

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 29.

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VASQUEZ FOUND HIMSELF CONFRONTED BY TWO REVOLVERS AND A RIFLE IN THE HANDS OF THE JAMES BOYS AND DICK WRAYBURN. (CHAPTER XCVIII.)

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Jesse James' Exploits.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER XCVII.

DEATH FOR TRUMPS.

"Vasquez is a dangerous rascal. In cunning and audacity he has had no equal since the knights of the road began to do business on this coast."

The speaker was a well-to-do farmer.

He sat on the veranda of a hotel at Paso Robles Hot Springs, California, and his remarks were addressed to a consumptive-looking gentleman beside him.

At the end of the veranda, with their heels resting on the railing, were two other persons, whose faces showed signs of recent illness.

They could not help listening to the conversation between the farmer and the invalid, and they presently found it so interesting that their heels came down, and they put their heads together for a confidential chat.

"Where does this peculiar highwayman operate?" inquired the consumptive.

"All over. One week you will hear of him robbing the miners in Siskiyou; the next he will be holding up stages in Los Angeles County. He is a perfect dare-devil, and the officers of the State have about given up all hope of ever catching him. And yet there is a reward of fifteen thousand dollars for his capture dead or alive."

"Has he killed many people?"

"No, very few; but the other day he committed a most atrocious murder, if reports be true."

"I would like to hear the particulars, for you have greatly aroused my curiosity in respect of this Mexican."

"He went to the ranch of a Kentuckian not twenty miles from Hollister, in San Benito County, last week, and because he was refused shelter—the Kentuckian knew the bandit by reputation, but being brave himself, did not fear him—he deliberately shot Colonel Halverson dead in his doorway."

The two persons at the end of the veranda pricked up their ears at the name of the murdered Kentuckian.

"And no one knows in what part of the State he is now, I suppose?"

"It is believed," returned the farmer, "that he is not far from this place."

"And have not the officers of this township gone in pursuit of him?" asked the invalid.

"No."

"No?" in astonishment; "and why not?"

"Because to search for Vasquez in the Coast Range would be like looking for a needle in a haystack. Every Mexican—and the woods are full of them hereabouts—is either his friend or stands in with him through fear, while the hiding-places are innumerable. But if I were an officer, and wanted to corral this dangerous rascal, I would attend the fandango at Manuel's adobe in the hills below here to-morrow night."

"Do you think Vasquez will be there?"

"I would gamble a hundred against a postage stamp that he will show up with his senorita. He is always cutting up some such dare-devil shine as that."

"I wish," replied the one-lunged tourist from the effete East, "I were as strong and active as I was a couple of years ago."

"Do you mean by that that you would tackle Vasquez single-handed, if you were a well man?"

"Yes."

"The party who sets out on an expedition of that kind had better order his coffin beforehand. I don't want any of it in mine, for one," said the farmer.

The conversation ceased.

The farmer mounted his horse, which had been tethered to the railing, and rode away.

Presently the consumptive left the veranda and returned to his room.

The only persons now on the veranda were the two men at the end.

"Frank," said one, in a deep, low voice, "that Colonel Halverson the granger spoke of as having been murdered by this Vasquez, is our mother's second cousin."

"Yes, Jess, without doubt."

"The man who put out his light has got to answer to me."

"And to me."

There was no mistaking the tones in which the words were uttered.

They were fraught with deadly meaning.

"How is your hip, Frank?"

"As well as ever. And how are those lungs of yours coming on?"

"They are about as well as they ever will be."

"And do you feel strong, Jess? You look as pale as a ghost."

"Looks don't count for anything, Frank, when a man has been cooped up indoors for weeks. I feel as strong as a bull, and I'm just aching to take the road and show this devil of a Vasquez, there are two men in California who are not afraid of him."

"Whose names are Frank and Jesse James," said the other, with a smile that meant business as well as pleasantry.

The two notorious outlaws, whose deeds of violence had made them the terror of the Mississippi Valley, had been for some months resting quietly and "under the rose," at the Paso Robles house, kept by their uncle.

They had come to California for their health, Jesse having been wounded in the lungs and Frank in the hip during some of their desperate encounters in the border States.

The story told by the farmer had roused their dormant energies, and made them eager to again pursue the old reckless life.

"Frank," said Jesse, with decision, "I am going to attend that fandango to-morrow night."

"I am with you."

"Of course you are, and we'll not only kill or capture the high-and-mighty Mexican bandit, but we will collar the reward besides."

"Why not? Our identity is not suspected, and we will be the Johnson brothers who will do the trick, and not the terrible James boys."

A few miles from Cholame Valley, in one of the deepest cañons of the Coast Range, is a flat of several acres, covered with a dense growth of manzanitas.

A trail passes through it, by which the Colame may be reached.

But very few persons knew of this trail, however, at the time of which we write, and the little flat, which bore the name of Grizzly Hollow, was never visited, except by occasional hunters.

Frank and Jesse James, on their way to the fandango, stumbled onto the trail by accident.

They had started from Paso Robles early the following morning, and, while following one trail, in pursuance of instructions given them by an hostler at the hotel, turned into the one which intersected Grizzly Hollow without knowing that they had made any deviation from the regular route.

About noon they halted on the banks of a small stream not one hundred yards distant from the opening into Grizzly Hollow, for the purpose of partaking of a light lunch in the shape of sandwiches and cheese.

In order to make use of the stream, they left the trail and rode a few rods through a dense growth of elders.

When they finally dismounted and prepared for refreshments, they were entirely hidden from the trail.

Five minutes passed, and no words had been spoken by either of them since the attack on the sandwiches and had begun, when the sound of horses' hoofs in the near distance caused them to hold their breath while they listened.

Soon a man's voice was heard coming from the direction of the trail.

"Say what you will, Manuel, the boss is not giving Bill a square deal. He may be a spy, but I'm gambling that he's white all the same. Vasquez has put up a job on him, that's what's the matter, old stick-in-the-mud."

Then another voice spoke, in good English, but with a slight Spanish accent:

"No matter what you think, Senor Ricardo. The sentence has been pronounced, and Bill must die, unless he has the luck of a coyote and makes the right guess."

What further conversation ensued between the two horsemen was lost to the ears of Frank and Jesse James.

The latter, who scented the biggest kind of a sensation and who let fall a vigorous ejaculation when Vasquez's name was mentioned, crept swiftly and stealthily back to the trail and followed it until he was able to locate the horsemen.

When he returned, after some ten minutes, to the impatient but cool-headed Frank, his eyes were gleaming with savage excitement.

"They have stopped in a little flat ahead of us. There's a hut of bushes there, and it's a regular stamping-ground for Vasquez's gang. There are five of them in the flat, and our Injun is with them."

"Vasquez?"

"Yes."

"Then let's be going."

Experts in woodcraft, the two outlaws left their horses in the glade, and glided noiselessly through the bushes until they reached the flat and had obtained an admirable position behind a huge rock not ten feet from the hut of bushes spoken of by Jesse James.

The dreaded Vasquez and his gang were all on hand when the eyes of Frank and Jesse James took in the details of the scene.

Lashed to a tree near the hut was a black-bearded man of handsome presence. He was tall, broad-shouldered and straight as an arrow, but his face was as pale as death, and, as the unseen spectators regarded him, his dark, piercing eyes, in fear mingled with hate, swept the faces of the quintet in front of him, and then sought the ground.

"One chance in five! I am lost!"

As the James boys soon learned, he was a detective known as Bronco Bill.

"Carmelita!" called Vasquez, in a loud, authoritative tone, and a girl of eighteen, small, lithe and dark, with dusky braids of hair and large, languishing black eyes that on occasion could burn savagely, stepped quickly forward from the little hut made of bushes, and looked calmly at the outlaw chief.

"Bring the rifles."

She bowed, turned on her heel, to return in a moment with five rifles, a burden that would have made an ordinary woman of her size stagger and pant with exhaustion.

She was muscle and endurance personified, and she bore the weapons of death with perfect ease.

Resting the five rifles against a tree, she drew from a silken pouch, secured to a sash tied about her waist, a box of cartridges, and handed it to Vasquez.

Her scarlet lips quivered slightly as she met his cold, searching gaze, but there was a peculiar smile on her face when she turned from him and flashed one quick, meaning glance on Bronco Bill.

"I think," said the leader of the bandits, slowly, with a cruel smile, "that on this occasion it will be the wiser plan to use, not this box of cartridges, Carmelita *mia*, but one of my own, this."

He held up a box taken from his pocket, and carelessly tossed the other to the Mexican girl, who, to Bronco Bill's amazement, caught it with a laugh.

"It's all the same to me, senor," she said, in light, silvery accents, and with a scornful toss of her small, shapely head. "But you must not forget," she added, quickly, as Vasquez opened the box, which he held up high for all to view, "that I am to prepare the blank."

A close observer might have noticed a slight pallor which crept into her face as she ceased speaking.

Frank James nudged Jesse, and whispered:

"That girl's a stayer. She's in love with the detective and Vasquez knows it. The cunning rascal, in revenging himself on this Bronco Bill, is inflicting a mortal wound on her at the same time."

"I am just itching to give the cursed greaser a good one in the back of the neck. I could break his spine the first shot."

"Wait, wait, don't be impatient. Our chance will come presently," whispered Frank James.

Carmelita took the cartridge which Vasquez now handed to her, and with a penknife quickly removed the bullet.

"There," she said, as she placed the blank in his hand, "it is done, and may the blessed saints speak him."

She was off and concealed from observation in the hut before the prisoner could open his lips to speak his gratitude for her sympathy.

The critical moment in the affair was now approaching.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

JESSE JAMES AND VASQUEZ.

Vasquez rapidly charged each rifle with one cartridge.

Bronco Bill saw that one weapon held the blank, but the five were so mixed up a moment later—Vasquez turning his back to the prisoner, and, having the rifles on the ground in front of him during the operation—that he knew that he could not identify the one which was meant to be his savior.

"Now," said the notorious leader of the outlaws, when all was ready and he stood before Bronco Bill with the five rifles resting against his right arm, "make your choice."

The victim shut his eyes, and a cold shiver passed through his frame.

Only one chance in five!

Again he told himself that he was lost.

"Come," was Vasquez's stern and contemptuous injunction, as he hesitated, "let's get this little circus over as soon as possible; I want to make arrangements to take in the fandango at the house of our friend Manuel to-night."

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Bronco Bill looked up, stretched out a trembling hand and selected a rifle at random.

With an expression of savage exultation on his face, the outlaw chief handed the weapon to one of his followers, the American called Dick, a tall, raw-boned mountaineer, with a thin face, a long, hawk nose, and black, piercing eyes.

His name was Richard Wrayburn, but he was never addressed but as "Dick," or "Ricardo."

Dick took the rifle in his long, bony hands, and slowly, steadily, and without the quiver of a muscle took deadly aim at the bound prisoner.

Frank and Jesse James witnessed this action with hands down.

They had resolved to allow the strange sentence to be carried out.

But there was a reason for this sudden change in their programme.

The reason looked out of the eyes of Carmelita, who had come upon them from behind, while they were all eyes and ears for the drama in front of them.

She had touched Jesse lightly on the arm before he became aware of her presence.

With her fingers to her lips, she enjoined silence on the startled James boys.

"Do nothing until I give the signal. Senor Barron is in no danger at present."

Therefore, the bold outlaws from the Mississippi Valley waited with lowered pistols while Dick prepared to execute the order of Vasquez.

The tall bandit took his time to get a good bead on the prisoner.

But Bronco Bill saw him not.

Once more were his eyes closed, but his lips moved spasmodically.

Click! click!

A pause of ten seconds, and then:

"Snap! bang!"

"Dead!" yelled Vasquez, in diabolical glee, as soon as the report had died away, "dead, and our fortune is made, boys!"

Bronco Bill's head was bowed upon his breast while the words were being uttered.

To the utter consternation of the chief of the outlaws, he looked up when Vasquez had ceased speaking.

"Your promise," he said, coldly, but resolutely, "remember it. Release me, for I was in luck, you see—I drew the blank."

"Not hurt?" gasped his enemy, in amazement mingled with fear, "why, I——"

Before he could complete the sentence the Mexican girl, Carmelita, was at Bronco Bill's side.

A knife was in one hand, a revolver in the other. Quickly cutting the prisoner's bonds, she thrust the pistol into his hand, then turned and rapidly addressed Vasquez:

"You gave me your word. He is free to go, is he not?"

"Bet yer life, gal," answered Dick Wrayburn. "Ther trick's his'n—'twas a fair deal, and now he kin git."

"Hold!" commandingly spoke the outlaw leader, "there has been treachery here. The rifle which was used did not contain my blank. Another trial must be made."

"Never!" yelled Bronco Bill, with his back to the tree and his pistol cocked and pointed at his enemy.

"Men," shouted Vasquez, as he turned and addressed his followers, "will you stand by me?"

For answer Chavez, Manuel and Gonzalez ranged themselves by his side.

Dick Wrayburn withdrew a few paces and looked encouragingly at the detective.

"Now, then," said Vasquez, in a voice of triumph, "drop that pistol, Senor Barron, or we'll fill your carcass full of lead."

"Say that again, will you?"

The voice was deep and menacing, and came from behind the outlaw leader.

He turned his head with a start.

As he did so, Frank and Jesse James, pistols in hand, leaped from the rock and placed themselves beside Dick Wrayburn.

"Say that again, you cowardly greaser," said Jesse, in a white heat, "and I'll blow that murdering tongue of yours down your throat."

Vasquez looked from the speaker to Bronco Bill, and then from Bill to Jesse.

Death in front and death at the rear.

But the California bandit was a remarkable character.

He knew not the meaning of fear, for ever since his escape from the State prison some years before he had carried his life in his hand.

But, if he was fearless, he was also cunning, and even in the ticklish situation in which he now found himself placed, he thought he saw a loophole of escape.

"You may go," he said to Bronco Bill, curtly. "We will settle our differences later."

"Don't stir a step," called out Jesse James.

Vasquez scowled.

He had not counted on this sort of opposition.

From the dress and appearance of the newcomers, he had taken them for hunters, who had come accidentally upon the outlaw's retreat.

He had thought to placate them after he should have given Bronco Bill his liberty.

But his hopes of escaping from the terrible dilemma were dashed to the ground when Jesse James spoke.

In the notorious Western outlaw he recognized a spirit as reckless and independent as his own.

Bronco Bill, the detective, retained his position by the tree.

"I'm with you, my friends," he answered to Jesse James' commands. "Proceed with your rat-killing as quickly as you like."

The bandits who sided with Vasquez—Chavez, Gonzalez and Manuel—were armed with rifles, and stood ready to use them at a word from their chief.

There was a short pause, and then Vasquez said to Jesse James, as he showed his white teeth in a smile that could accompany a murder:

"I am sorry, gentlemen, that you should desire to interfere with my programme."

"And what is it?" inquired Frank James.

"To attend the fandango this evening, with Senorita Carmelita as my partner."

The Mexican girl shrugged her pretty shoulders, and then turned her back to the bandit leader.

"I am going to the dance, but you will not be there, Senor Vasquez," returned Jesse James, quietly.

"But I shall be there. You mistake, senor," as quietly replied the other.

"The murderer of Colonel Halverson shall never leave this spot alive."

The speaker was Frank James.

"Now, Jesse," he cried, before a move could be made or a word said by any one, "let him have it."

Before the speech was finished, Vasquez dropped like a shot to the ground.

Three bullets clove the air over his head.

The next instant the circus opened in earnest.

The Mexicans who supported Vasquez opened fire on the James boys, and this engaged their sole attention for a while; and at the same time Dick Wrayburn took a hand, but not in behalf of his old leader.

One shot from the rifle he held in his hand put the quietus on Gonzales, who was about to take deadly aim at Frank James; and Bronco Bill was snapping a useless pistol in a violent rage, when Vasquez rose from the ground and fired straight at the detective's head.

Bronco Bill staggered and then fell heavily to the ground.

Carmelita, who had retired into the hut when the firing commenced, saw her detective lover fall, and, with a scream that was expressive of the wildest agony and rage, darted forth and would perhaps have met her death at the hands of the now infuriated Vasquez, had not Jesse James caught her by the arm as she was passing him.

The fight with the bandit chieftain's three supporters was now over, for the James boys, assisted by Dick Wrayburn, had won the victory.

Gonzales and Chavez lay dead in the grass.

Manuel, with a broken arm, had thrown down his rifle and made his escape through the trees.

"Don't bother with him," said Jesse James to Carmelita. "Leave the greaser to me."

The girl bowed her head and dropped her hands to her side.

Vasquez now found himself covered by two revolvers and a rifle.

He was in the most desperate situation of his life. Every avenue of escape seemed to be cut off.

Bronco Bill lay terribly wounded, perhaps dead, on the ground at his feet; and, with his revolver in his hand, Vasquez stood at bay, with teeth set hard and no sign of terror in his eyes.

If he died then, it would be as he had lived, game.

"You don't deserve any mercy at my hands," said Jesse James, sternly, "and you won't get it. You have just one minute to live."

"Senor," returned Vasquez, with an admirable assumption of humility, "you have, indeed, got me in the door. But I do not desire to go to my death with the thought that you have misjudged me. I did not murder Colonel Halverson. Carmelita, there, knows that he was killed in a fair fight."

Carmelita nodded her head.

She now hated the bandit with a deadly hate, but she was too fair-minded to refuse to do him an act of justice when, as she believed, he stood in the very valley of the shadow of death.

Jesse James frowned.

"I fought a duel with Colonel Halverson. The weapons were knives, and I was the victor."

"Then you shall also fight a knife duel, and with me," said Jesse, resolutely.

"I am at your service, senor."

Frank James expostulated with his brother, but to no purpose.

Dick Wrayburn also urged the Missouri desperado to forego his intention.

"You will be at a terrible disadvantage," he said, "for Vasquez is a master of the weapon. He is as quick and active as a cat, and as treacherous."

But Jesse James only smiled in answer.

He was no novice himself in the use of the knife, and Frank, realizing that the honors were easy, at least on the score of proficiency, finally ceased his objections.

"Where shall the duel take place?" asked Jesse.

"If you are not afraid, senor," replied Vasquez, with a suggestive gleam of his white teeth, "let it come off in the hut, with the door closed and fastened on the outside. There is no window, and there won't be much light."

"Anywhere, in pitch darkness or broad daylight, out in the open or in the smallest hole we can get into—I'm with you to the death," answered Jesse James, recklessly.

And into the hut the two desperate and notorious outlaws went, Vasquez congratulating himself on the thought that he would have an easy victory.

When the duelists had disappeared within the hut, Dick Wrayburn closed and secured the door.

Frank James walked around the hut and scrutinized it at every point.

Satisfied that the door afforded the only means of egress and ingress, Frank James took up a position beside Wrayburn and waited with ill-concealed anxiety for the termination of the struggle that must be taking place within.

But, though several minutes had passed since Vasquez and Jesse James had entered the hut, no sounds from within reached the ears of the two listeners.

Two, we say, for Carmelita's entire attention was absorbed by Bronco Bill.

He had had a narrow escape from death.

The bullet from Vasquez's pistol had plowed a ridge in his scalp, but had not broken the skull.

The shock had produced a sudden faintness, from which he had soon recovered, and now the Mexican girl sat on the ground with his head in her lap, murmuring soft, endearing words into his ear.

Ten minutes, and still no sound from within.

Frank James' impatience and anxiety could no longer be repressed.

"Hello, in there!" he shouted, with his mouth to the keyhole of the door. "Is any one alive?"

He thought he heard a faint moan for answer, but was not sure.

Again he shouted.

The moan was repeated.

Dick Wrayburn's ears also caught the sound.

He threw open the door.

Frank James rushed in, fearing the worst.

And the worst had apparently happened.

For there, prostrate on the floor, lay Jesse James, the king of the border outlaws.

And Vasquez! Where was he?

Dick Wrayburn's eyes sought every corner in search of him.

But the California desperado was not in the room.

He had mysteriously disappeared.

CHAPTER XCIX.

THE BANDIT'S CUNNING RUSE.

Dick Wrayburn ceased to speculate over the strange disappearance of Vasquez, and seizing a tin can, rushed outside to a spring near by for water.

A liberal application of the cold liquid on Jesse James' face and head soon brought him around.

He had been struck over the head with a billet of wood immediately upon his entrance into the room.

"The greaser is a coward," said Jesse, when he found words to speak. "The sudden change from light to semi-darkness blinded me, and before the door was fairly closed on us the sneaking rascal hit me a clip over the scone that made me see stars. But you've got him, haven't you?"

Frank was obliged to confess that Vasquez had vanished like a character in the Arabian Nights.

"And there is the explanation of his disappearance," remarked Dick Wrayburn.

He had discovered a trap door in the floor, which he lifted.

Frank James hurried to the spot, and striking a match, looked down into a hole about three feet square.

A ladder nailed perpendicularly to the timber supports told how the descent had been made.

"But where does the hole lead to? And is the greaser down there now?"

They were answered by hearing a faint shout, which caused them to turn sharply. Far up on the mountain side they beheld Vasquez.

The sight of him up there made the Missouri outlaw grit his teeth with rage.

He threw his pistol to the ground with an imprecation.

"I'll see you to-night at the fandango," yelled the Mexican, and his light, clear voice enabled his auditors to hear every word distinctly.

He was out of sight and danger, before the trio on the creek bank could recover from their astonishment.

"Do you think he will keep his word?" asked Jesse James of Wrayburn.

"He will face death a dozen times to keep it. You don't know him, gentlemen."

This answer gave pronounced satisfaction to both Frank and Jesse.

They would be on hand at the fandango, and a chance for playing even on the daring bandit would likely be presented.

Feeling that some sort of explanation was due to the two strangers who had arrived at the flat in time to save the life of Carmelita's lover, Dick Wrayburn said, as they walked back to the hut;

"I am, as you may doubtless suppose, a detective, like my friend Bill. We joined the gang a month ago, and had the points down fine for corraling the whole outfit when Vasquez spotted my partner in some way, and after a pretended trial, sentenced him to death. Carmelita, whom Vasquez idolizes in spite of the way he has treated her, interceded in favor of Bill, and the one chance in five was given him.

"I suspected treachery on the part of the bandit, and being determined to save my partner's life at all hazards, I doctored every blessed cartridge in Vasquez's own box. So you see I thought it was a sure shot that Bill would escape.

"I know now, however, that I was wrong in taking any chances, for Vasquez had made up his mind that Bill must die, and he would have gone under but for your prompt arrival and gallant interference, gentlemen."

Dick Wrayburn had discarded his uncouth manner of speaking ever since he had taken a stand against the bandit leader.

The James boys liked this new companion of theirs.

True, he was a detective, and detectives were their aversion, but Wrayburn was a thoroughbred as far as grit and manliness went, and they took to him at once.

As for Bronco Bill, they had not formed a decided opinion as to his merits as yet.

When the trio returned to the flat Bronco Bill was on his feet.

His head had been bound up by Carmelita, and as a like service had been previously performed for Jesse James, the two "soreheads" greeted each other with a laugh.

Introductions seemed to be in order at this point, and, as the Johnson boys, Frank and Jesse presented themselves to the good opinion of Bill Barron and Dick Wrayburn.

The conversation presently drifted to the subject of the fandango.

"If Vasquez appears there to-night," said Jesse James, "I shall either kill him or capture him alive. I am on his trail for two reasons—I want to get even for his treacherous treatment for me, and I want that reward."

"How about sharing if we stand in with you?" quietly suggested Dick Wrayburn.

"A fair and square divvy, of course."

"When it came time for the party to move, Carmelita had disappeared.

"She's all right," explained Bronco Bill. "She will be at the fandango to-night, and she will dance with Vasquez."

He spoke of the matter so coolly that Frank James exclaimed in surprise, mingled with disgust:

"What! will you allow her to further associate with this villain who tried to murder you?"

"I don't know as I ought to prevent their meeting."

"Why not?"

"Because she's his wife."

CHAPTER C.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

It was some ten miles from Grizzly Hollow to the ranch of Manuel, where the fandango was to take place.

On the way thither Frank and Jesse James and their detective companions passed through the small town of San Ygnacio.

Dick Wrayburn's home was in San Ygnacio, and as he had been absent from it for several weeks, he resolved to make a short stop there.

At his earnest invitation the James boys accompanied him.

Bronco Bill went to the hotel and mingled with the crowd there to pick up information.

He found that no one in the town had received any intimation that Vasquez would likely attend the fandango at Manuel's that evening.

For reasons connected with the reward, he did not see fit to publish the information he had received as to the dreaded bandit's intentions.

Dick Wrayburn was a widower, and his daughter Estelle kept house for him.

She was seventeen, but fully developed, and of the blond type of beauty.

Her melting blue eyes and bewitching smile had already made sad havoc among the hearts of the eligible young men of the place.

Estelle treated them all alike, although if she had a preference, it must have been for the good-looking, stalwart, deep-voiced lawyer, Graham Quint.

The vigilantes, so Estelle informed her father and his guests, had arranged to start for the hills in quest of Vasquez and his band on the morrow.

Wrayburn said nothing to his daughter of the fandango, but when dinner was over, prepared to leave her again.

"Important business up the road," was the only explanation for his departure that he gave her. She knew that he was a detective, and, being accustomed to his ways, asked no questions.

Bronco Bill rejoined them at the outskirts of the town, and as night was falling they reached the summit of a long hill, at the foot of which, in a small valley, nestled the commodious abode of Manuel, whose main room with its polished floor of clay was all in readiness for the fandango.

Bronco Bill, who bestrode the fleetest horse, was half-way down the hill and a quarter of a mile in advance of his companions, when a figure sprang out of the bushes into the road and seized the bridle of his horse.

It was that of a woman, and before the horseman could move or speak she uttered the warning words in a soft, silvery voice:

"Death awaits you at the turn beyond. Turn back, if you ever loved me."

"Carmelita!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Yes, Carmelita," was her quick reply, "who has sworn——"

"I know," he hastily interrupted, as if he feared that other ears might hear, "and you can be depended upon, for you are as true as steel, and as good as gold. But," gazing ahead of him in the semi-darkness, "what is the danger? The adobe is scarcely a mile distant. Why are you here? He has——"

"The danger is from the man who has made my

life a curse," she interrupted, "whose life you now seek to take."

"Vasquez?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Below, between here and the adobe. Ah, there are your friends," she exclaimed, in a tone of relief, and upon the words darted into the bushes at the side of the road.

"Carmelita!" called Bronco Bill after her.

"What is it?"

"Shall you be at the fandango?"

"Yes."

He said no more, and putting spurs to his horse rode on toward the adobe, thus entirely disregarding the warning he had received.

The sight of Wrayburn and the James boys may have given him courage, or he may have scouted the idea of danger.

Whatever his reasons were for paying no attention to Carmelita's words, certain it is that he had no opportunity for an explanation, for he had no sooner turned the bend in the road spoken of by the Mexican girl than a rifle bullet pierced his brain, and he fell from his horse to the roadside, dead.

Frank James was the first to reach the spot where lay the body of the slain detective.

Dick Wrayburn was close beside him.

The latter shuddered when he gazed down into the dead face of his partner.

"That Vasquez is a very devil in his hate! He swore to kill poor Bill, and I knew all the time that he would keep his word. My turn will come next, I suppose, for the Mexican must know by this time that I am a detective as well as Bill."

"This spoils our little game, Frank," sorrowfully remarked Jesse James.

"How so?"

"Why, Vasquez won't dare show up at the adobe after this racket."

"Don't worry," put in Dick Wrayburn, with decision, "for he will be there. He has said it, and if a whole regiment of United States soldiers were stationed in front of the door to bar his progress, he would keep his word."

The body of Bronco Bill was lifted to the back of the horse Wrayburn had ridden and secured to it by the riata attached to the horn of the saddle.

"You will have to take in the fandango without my company, I am afraid," the detective said, "for my business now is at San Ygnacio."

"We can take care of ourselves," said Jesse. "Good-night."

The brothers rode on, while Wrayburn, leading the horse which held as a burden the dead body of his partner, walked sorrowfully back to the little town he had left but an hour before.

The horsemen drew rein in front of Manuel's adobe just after sundown.

If they had arrived early, there were others who had reached the place earlier, for the veranda of the adobe was filled with men and women, mostly native Californians, when the James boys dismounted from their animals and tethered them to one of the many cottonwoods that grew in the vicinity.

The spectacle of so many dark-skinned natives was not an encouraging one, for the probability was that they were either outspoken friends of the outlaw chief, or else were composed of the large number of his nationality who winked at his crimes and gave him aid and shelter whenever the demand for the same was made.

But the two men whose names had been associated with so many bloody and dare-devil enterprises in the States throughout the Mississippi Valley, were not the ones to turn back from their mission of vengeance and enrichment, though Vasquez and his entire band were opposed to them.

They were in a nest of vipers, and if they escaped that night with their lives, it would be by some wonderful stroke of luck.

They went out into the side room, where the liquors were kept, and looked into the faces of the crowd to see if there were any Americans among them.

Yes, there was one, a man of stalwart form, who had just arrived.

He was dressed like a hunter, wore long, yellowish hair, and a beard of the same color covered the larger part of his face.

But his eyes were brown and honest, and their keen, piercing gaze was at once directed on the James boys.

The drinkers in the room were making so much noise that Jesse did not know that the American desired to speak to him until certain significant gesticulations made him press his way through the crowd to the open doorway at the rear, where the man stood.

Frank James followed his brother.

"Come outside," said the hunter, "where we can converse without fear of interruption."

His rich voice in the utterance of English words was pleasant to hear after the foreign jabber that they had been forced to listen to lately.

Under a tree at some distance from the adobe, the hunter thus addressed the two Missourians:

"I have seen Dick Wrayburn, and I know who you are."

Jesse started, but the next words of the speaker quieted his fears.

"Dick told me you were men who could be de-

pended upon, and to prove his words, described what had taken place this forenoon down in Grizzly Hollow."

"Where did you see him?" asked Frank James.

"About two miles from here on the road to San Ygnacio. He was on his way to town with the dead body of Bronco Bill."

"And what is your name and business?" inquired Jesse James.

"My name is Graham Quint, and I am a lawyer. But my business here to-night is not connected with my profession, for I am in disguise as the advance runner of the vigilantes of San Ygnacio, whose leader I am, and who have sworn to exterminate Vasquez and his infamous and terrible band of highwaymen and murderers."

"And where are your men—the regulators?"

"They will reach the valley inside of an hour, but will not make for the abode until they hear the signal, the hoot of a night owl. And now that I have told you who I am and what my purpose is, can I count on your assistance to-night?"

"If we are here when you need assistance, we will give it readily," answered Jesse.

Quint was forced to be satisfied with this assurance, and after a few more words they returned to the adobe.

Jesse James took the first opportunity that offered itself to speak with his brother in regard to the lawyer's designs.

"Another interference with our scheme. I tell you what, Frank, I am going to down that greaser myself. Keep close to me all the evening, for there's no telling what may happen."

Soon after this conversation the orchestra, consisting of a violin and a guitar, each manipulated by a Mexican, started up the music for the first dance.

Jesse James looked about for Carmelita, and not knowing of her presence down the road before the murder of Bronco Bill, was surprised and disappointed at not beholding her pretty face among the many Mexican women present.

The fact that she was the wife of Vasquez gave him no concern.

He was not in love with her, nor did he fear that she would betray him or his brother into the power of that remorseless fiend, her husband.

The brothers were seated on a bench against the wall, and were watching the dancers as they glided gracefully over the smooth clay floor to the soft, sensuous music of the little orchestra, when Vasquez opened the door of the bedroom and stepped into the apartment.

He was dressed in the rich and elegant costume of a Spanish cavalier, and his eagle glance swept the room without a sign of apprehension.

But there was a frown on his brow when he

stooped to ask a question of an old duenna who was enacting the rôle of a wallflower.

Jesse James, who was sitting but a few feet away, caught the word, "Carmelita," and knew that the bandit was displeased at her absence.

But when Vasquez raised his head the frown had disappeared.

His eyes were turned toward the veranda, and, following his gaze, the James boys saw Carmelita standing in the doorway.

As she was about to advance into the room, the disguised leader of the vigilantes stepped in from the veranda and laid his hand on her arm.

He was unaware of the presence of the bandit whose capture he was desirous of effecting, or he would never have acted with such rashness.

Carmelita turned with a start when she felt Quint's touch upon her arm, and the slight exclamation of dismay that she gave utterance to was followed instantly by a sharp, vindictive "Carajo!" from the lips of her husband.

The next instant bang! went a pistol, and the only light in the room, the lantern suspended from the ceiling, went out, leaving the room in darkness.

Jesse James saw the flash of the silver of Vasquez's pistol when the outlaw chief uttered his imprecation, and when the shot put out the light, the Missouri desperado knew whose hand had fired it.

"The bars are down," he said to Frank, when they found themselves in darkness. "You look out for Carmelita, and I will attend to that devil of a husband of hers."

Jesse James, with a leap like that of a panther, had fastened his fingers about Vasquez's throat before the report of the pistol had fairly died away.

"Now, curse your treacherous soul, I've got you," hissed the Missourian in his victim's ear. "It was your turn this morning; it's mine now."

Vasquez could only utter a faint, hoarse wheeze, so tightly did the fingers of his adversary press his throat.

But if he could not speak he could make physical resistance, and his lithe body wriggled and strained in a powerful endeavor to wrench loose from the muscular force that held it down.

Of no avail.

Vasquez had more than met his match, as far as strength went, in Jesse James.

The words of command had been spoken to Frank, and Jesse had lifted the now fainting bandit in his powerful arms and was making his way to the back door, when a loud, suggestive report in his near vicinity made him loose the fingers of one hand and give utterance to a sharp cry.

He had been wounded in the arm, and it was the shock to his "funny bone," which not only underwent a moment of acute pain, but produced temporary paralysis of the arm and hand.

But he still held the now fast-recovering Vasquez by his slender waist, and might, in spite of his disadvantage, have made his way to the door and Frank had not an arm crooked about his windpipe and made him drop his burden and think only of his own safety.

Not a word fell from the lips of his new adversary until a kick against his shins by Jesse with all the force that a desperate emergency could call forth, made him relax his hold about the Missourian's neck and utter a howl of pain.

On the instant Jesse set up the old Quantrell yell, and its answer came quickly from the outside.

A struggle for life or death followed.

Jesse James, beset by two vindictive enemies, with but one good arm, fought against the terrible odds with the ferocity of a tiger.

A blow from his fist, aimed in the direction where he supposed Vasquez to be, caught that worthy in the pit of the stomach, and sent him sprawling backward with a howl of agony.

Immediately upon the giving of the blow he wheeled and caught the unknown adversary who had shot him, about the waist with his one useful arm, and with an almost superhuman effort, threw him upon the floor.

A stinging sensation in the shoulder now warned him that Vasquez had again assumed the offensive.

Just what happened afterward he never could tell. He knew that he used his pistol, and that his knife was brought into requisition; that he seemed to be assaulted on all sides; that while he was making terrible lunges with his knife a weight settled on his brain, and consciousness left him.

The struggle had ceased when Frank James and Graham Quint burst into the room.

The latter had provided himself with a lantern, and its light disclosed two forms lying side by side near the door of the bedroom.

One was Jesse James, wounded and insensible.

The other was Manuel, the bandit, whose arm had been broken by Jesse James' bullet at Grizzly Hollow.

He was stone dead.

Vasquez had escaped.

CHAPTER CII.

A STRUGGLE FOR LIFE.

Jesse James' encounter with Vasquez and Manuel left him very near death's door.

It was a fortnight before he was able to get up and around.

The vigilantes, accompanied by Dick Wrayburn, arrived at the abode about half-an-hour after Vasquez's flight.

The wounded Missourian was carried to Wray-

burn's house in San Ygnacio, where he was tenderly nursed back to health by Estelle.

One evening, after the Bandit King had fully recovered his strength, Estelle strolled out with Graham Quint. The night was pitchy black, and for that reason they were urged not to stray very far.

They were standing just outside of the door of the house, having returned from their stroll, when Quint uttered a deep groan and fell heavily to the ground.

A powerful blow from behind, from the clenched hand of some person who had come suddenly from the bushes hard by, had effected the young man's downfall.

A shriek from Estelle was quickly stifled by her lover's assailant, and she was silently borne away through the bushes. After what seemed an interminably long time, she was put down on the bank of a creek in a cross-cañon, thickly wooded.

Here, in the hollow trunk of a mammoth redwood, large enough to serve as a commodious room, Estelle's captor halted and deposited her form on a couch of bear and panther skins.

The tree had one other occupant—a man.

He was sitting on a rustic chair, and Estelle shuddered and grew sick at heart when her eyes fell upon him.

* * * * *

It was not through the lenity of the dreaded Mexican bandit that Graham Quint had not been killed outright in front of the hut of bushes.

His assailant, a powerfully-built member of Vasquez's band, had acted under instructions, and those instructions were to entrap and carry off the girl.

The young lawyer's life might have been ended before this but for the presence in the hills of vigilantes and the scattering of the bandit's forces.

As it happened, Quint was on his feet about five minutes after the departure of his assailant and his fair captive.

A search for the abducted girl proved fruitless.

His face lengthened somewhat when a turn in the road he had been following brought him face to face with Wrayburn and Jesse and Frank James.

"Where—where is Estelle?" gasped the girl's father, when he saw that Quint was alone.

The alarming story was soon told.

Wrayburn buried his face in his hands.

Estelle's lover regarded him pityingly.

Suddenly the detective's hands fell to his side, and instead of a countenance tearful and expressive of poignant anguish, Quint beheld it black and convulsed with murderous wrath.

"I'll kill him—kill him as I would a mad dog."

"Who?"

"Vasquez."

"If there is any life in him after I get through with

him, you are welcome to take it out," muttered Jesse James, under his breath.

"When will you start?" inquired Quint, eagerly.

"At once."

"May I go with you?"

"Yes," said the outlaw, shortly.

The sun was sinking when they left the main road, which, after a sharp descent, followed the windings of one of the tributaries of the creek to whose bank Estelle had been carried a prisoner.

After a long tramp Wrayburn said, gravely:

"We are nearing a spot where I expect to obtain help. There is a cave a short distance beyond, which is inhabited by a woman. She is the mother of Carmelita.

"I knew her months ago, and she then had the bad taste to fall in love with me. She is not over thirty-five, and, though not as stylish-like as her daughter, is yet quite good-looking. Now, a Mexican woman in love is a curious creature. She will go to extremes to assist the object of her affections. Queer, isn't it, that such a woman, beautiful, cunning and cruel—she is all three—should lose her heart, and to me."

Soon after the cave was reached, and Jovita, the Mexican woman, appeared at the entrance.

She was a mature edition of Carmelita, and did not look a day over thirty.

Her face was all smiles when she saw Dick Wrayburn.

She had no eyes for his companions.

Estelle's father drew her aside and they talked together in low tones, inaudible to Quint and the James boys, for some moments.

The young lawyer was beginning to feel vexed and uncomfortable and Jesse was about to open his mouth to say something pertinent to the occasion, when Wrayburn turned to the three men and said:

"I know where my daughter is, and Jovita has promised to assist me in rescuing her. I am sorry that circumstances will prevent your going with us, gentlemen. Remain here until we return. We shall not be gone more than half an hour, for the distance to be traversed is short."

The James boys felt that they were entitled to some explanation for this change of programme, and Jesse was about to ask a question, when Wrayburn went on quickly:

"The undertaking is a very dangerous one. Cunning must be met with cunning. If you were to accompany us, you would be in the way, and might defeat the accomplishment of that which is of paramount importance to you as well as to myself. Jovita has the *entrée* of the bandit's secret hiding place, and she will pave the way for an easy rescue of my daughter."

"But Vasquez?" said Frank James, with a glance

at Jesse, who was biting his lips in vexation. "Where do we come in?"

"I will fix things so that his capture will be certain."

He paused and contracted his brows in deep thought.

"If anything should happen to interfere with our plans," he continued, "I will give you the cry of an owl. If you hear it, act as you may think best. If you love my daughter"—he now turned to Quint—"act according to my advice. Can I depend on you?"

"Yes," was the quick, impulsive answer, though the young man's brain was in a whirl.

The detective now fastened an inquiring gaze on each of the James boys.

"Don't worry your head about us," said Frank, quickly.

This answer, though not direct, satisfied Dick Wrayburn.

Jovita meanwhile had turned her back on the three men.

"In the cave," pursued the detective, "you boys will find accommodations for resting and a bite to eat. Make yourselves comfortable while we are gone."

With these words Estelle's father waved his hand at the three men who had been his companions, and then, in company with Carmelita's mother, went away through the bushes.

For some moments not a word was spoken by any one of the three left at the cave.

Jesse James broke the silence by an ejaculation that was more forcible than elegant.

"I'm not going to stay here," he said, emphatically.

"Nor I," said Frank.

"I have given my word to remain, and I must keep it," remarked Graham Quint, "but neither of you gentlemen are under any obligations to stay, for I heard what you said when asked to follow Wrayburn's advice, and it cannot be legally construed into a promise."

"Legally, no," laughed Jesse. "Morally—well, we are not moral people, Frank and I—and will therefore let that point slide."

The lawyer thought he was joking, and smiled.

"You can stay here and pipe off the scenery," resumed Jesse James, "but my brother and I are not doing the scenery act this evening, and we will therefore pipe off the senora. She's not to be trusted, or I'm no judge. Eh, Frank?"

"Right as a trivet. Come on, let's be off, or the darkness will spoil all chances of following her."

When the brothers had gone Quint sat down on a rock in front of the cave in deep reflection.

Minutes passed, when a suspicious noise behind him caused him to turn suddenly.

A man was in the act of emerging from the cave.

He was dressed in panther skins, a cap of the same material adorned his head, and he might have been an Indian from the color of his skin, for his smooth face was as brown as a berry.

But Graham Quint took but slight notice of the stranger's peculiarities.

His eyes were riveted on the long knife carried in the right hand.

One thought passed like lightning through his mind.

An ambush had been laid for him.

His murder had been deliberately planned.

In the fiendish scheme no account had been taken of the James boys, for the schemers had looked for the appearance at the cave of only two persons—the father and the lover of the beautiful Estelle.

Who had planned the ambush?

No time for reflection on this proposition; time only for action, prompt and decisive.

His revolver was out as the assassin leaped forward, and shot after shot rang out, mingled with groans and cries, and terminating in a hand-to-hand struggle for life.

CHAPTER CIII.

THE LAWYER FALLS INTO A TRAP.

Graham Quint's finger pressed the trigger of his pistol in the nick of time, and the man with the panther-skin suit dropped his knife—the wrist of the hand having been shattered by the bullet—and, regardless of the danger and of his own disadvantage, thought to throw himself upon the lawyer.

But a second report, following closely upon the heels of the first, brought the murderous bandit to his knees.

Even then, with a leg useless as well as an arm, he stubbornly continued to fight.

With one arm that could be used, he encircled his antagonist about the ankles, and, exerting all his force, lifted Quint off his feet and threw him to the ground.

But the advantage thus gained was of little use to the man with the panther-skin suit, for in the physical struggle which followed, he proved no match for his strong and well-conditioned foe.

Not until Quint had his knees on the wounded desperado's chest, and his fingers about his throat, did he open his lips to speak.

"Are you satisfied?" was the stern interrogation.

"Yes"—faintly—"ease up on my windpipe and I'll quit."

Quint removed his fingers, and then picking up his revolver which had fallen from his hand when he was thrown down, took a seat on a boulder a few feet away, and pointed the muzzle of the weapon at his prostrate enemy.

The bandit raised himself on one elbow for a few moments, then sank back fainting and exhausted to his former condition.

Up to this moment Estelle's lover had given no thought to the possible effects of his shots, but with the fainting of his assailant, he put up his pistol and proceeded quickly and skillfully to bind up the wounds.

After his pale, damp face had been bathed with water from a spring close by, the wounded bandit opened his eyes, and began to talk.

"Am I done for?" he asked, a wild terror in his eyes.

For reasons of his own Quint did not see fit to state the truth as he viewed it.

"I can't tell you," he replied, gravely; "for I am no surgeon."

The villain groaned.

His fear put the worst construction on the young man's words.

"Curse her! curse 'em all!" he savagely muttered. "If I had not been a bigger fool than Thompson's colt I would never have run into this snap."

"Who put you up to it?" was Quint's pertinent question.

The wounded man glared suspiciously at the questioner until a sharp twinge gave a serious complexion to his thoughts.

"If I live will you prosecute me?" he asked.

"Not if you act like a sensible man now," was the reply.

"All right, I see the point. Well, then, Jovita put me up to it."

"What was her reason for desiring my death?"

"You are in her way."

"In her way?—how?"

Graham Quint was surprised beyond measure.

"She hopes to marry Dick Wrayburn and corral all his money. He's well fixed, I suppose you know."

"His pecuniary affairs have never given me the slightest concern," said the young man, coldly.

"Well, he is rich, all the same; got a raise lately and told the old gal, the senora, I mean, all about it. Now, if she marries him, and he should happen to die while Estelle lived, the daughter would come in for a big slice of the boodle."

"What has all this rigmarole to do with Senora Jovita's hate of me?"

"I'll come to that. Jovita is a schemer. She looks ahead, locates the obstacles, then prepares to remove them. Obstacle number one is Estelle Wrayburn."

"And she is even now a prisoner in the hands of Vasquez," groaned the young lawyer.

"Correct for a thousand dollars," said the bandit, "and as Vasquez and the senora are pulling together

no, you can see that the girl's chances of life are mighty slim."

Quint made no comment, but with clenched hands waited for further revelations.

"Obstacle number two," the wounded desperado went on, "is yourself, because you are Miss Wrayburn's lover and a strong friend of the old man, the detective. If she should put the girl out of the way, and let you live, she would be under the constant fear that you would exert such influence over Wrayburn as to prevent the marriage. Now, do you see?"

"Yes, I see."

Presently he asked:

"Did Jovita act alone in this matter?"

"No."

"Who is with her?"

"Carmelita."

"When did you see the Mexican girl last?"

"A few hours ago."

"Did she mention my name?"

"Yes. She said she hoped her mother would succeed in her design of putting you out of the way."

Quint's face grew graver.

Once he had pitied Carmelita, for he had then looked upon her as a girl of good heart and generous impulses. The death of Bronco Bill seemed to have entirely changed her disposition.

She now lived only for revenge, and Vasquez had put her on the wrong scent, and made her regard as deadly enemies those who would be glad to be her friends.

Darkness had now fallen, and the moon was rising.

The wounded outlaw was about to speak again, when the hoot of a night owl was heard.

Quint started.

It was the signal of danger suggested by Dick Wrayburn.

The call was repeated.

The young man was flying down the cañon when the second appeal for aid sounded, and he stopped not in his headlong pace—the brightly shining moon enabling him to see about him distinctly—until he came to within a few rods of the mammoth redwood.

A deep groan from within the hollow trunk made him again press on.

He reached the tree, turned to make for the opening on the farther side, when half a dozen men, who seemed to spring out of the ground, set upon him and soon had him a bound and helpless prisoner.

He was carried into the natural apartment, where Estelle had been taken and thrown down without further ceremony.

The room was lighted by a lantern, and he could see everything about him plainly.

He saw his sweetheart—and a sharp pain seized his heart—and he saw Jovita.

But where was Vasquez?

And where were the James boys—or the Johnson brothers, as he knew them—and Dick Wrayburn, the detective?

CHAPTER CIV.

A CONFLICT IN THE MOONLIGHT.

None of the bandits remained in the tree after Graham Quint had been deposited on the floor.

The young man was determined to have a talk with Jovita, if he could.

She was looking at him with a strange smile, when he demanded:

"Where is Mr. Wrayburn?"

"Close to San Ygnacio by this time."

Quint was thunderstruck.

Jovita did not speak as if she were trying to evade the truth.

"Then he did not come to this spot with you?"

"No; he turned off a short distance up the cañon and took a cut-off for town."

"Why did he run away like a coward when he must have known that his daughter was here in the power of a merciless wretch, his bitter enemy?" cried the young lawyer, indignantly.

The lovely Estelle—between whom and her lover several eloquent glances had passed—spoke for Jovita and with convincing earnestness:

"He has gone for help. His vigilantes will be here before midnight. Without a large force, Vasquez and his band cannot be overcome."

Quint breathed a sigh of relief.

The explanation satisfied him, until he thought of the owl's call, of the attempt on his own life, and of the suspicions regarding the mother of Carmelita, which had arisen in his mind after listening to the words of the wounded bandit at the cave.

"The owl signal?" he questioned, looking searchingly at Jovita, "who gave it?"

"I did," she answered, calmly.

"And for what purpose, if I may ask? To lure me into a trap, or to befriend me as you have doubtless befriended Mr. Wrayburn?"

Again that strange smile, as she fixed her dark eyes on the young man's wrathful countenance.

"It was not given to call you," she said; "it was meant for the man you left behind."

"The man who tried to kill me?"

"Did he really try to kill you?"—mockingly.

Then, with a vengeful glance at him, she went on:

"It's a pity he did not succeed in the attempt."

What did she mean? What strange game was she playing? And how could Estelle believe her, as believe she must from the confidence with which the captive girl had spoken of the whereabouts and purposes of her father.

So ran Quint's thoughts, but if he had had eyes

for his sweetheart then, he would have noticed that she was deathly pale.

The language of the Mexican woman, the vindictiveness toward her lover with which it was charged, not only frightened her, but made her doubt the existence of any good quality, truth least of all, in Jovita.

The latter's manner showed that she enjoyed the confusion into which she had thrown the prisoners. But, after there had been a long silence, she said:

"There are wheels within wheels, and when both of you come to know the reason of to-night's doings you will——" she hesitated, and again that strange smile crept into her face.

"We will what?" quickly interrogated Quint, who was intensely interested in her words.

"You will understand my position in the affair perfectly."

She laughed lightly, showed her white teeth maliciously, and then turned away.

The young man was enraged, and yet at the same time he was devoured by curiosity; but it was a debatable matter whether she would deign to enter into a satisfying explanation.

To try her, he asked:

"Are you a friend or a foe?"

She wheeled quickly and faced him with a sneering smile.

"Not your friend, you may rest assured," she replied, snappishly.

"Are you the friend of this young lady?"

She hesitated a moment, Estelle regarding her in nervous expectancy, and then slowly made answer:

"Miss Wrayburn has been favored with my confidence to a certain extent, and from what I have told her she must be the judge as to whether I am her friend or her enemy."

"Are you the friend of her father?"

"Yes," promptly and earnestly.

"What do you say, Estelle?" asked her lover.

"I don't know what to say," she agitatedly responded, her hopes and her sympathies struggling with her doubts. "I want to believe in her. She has given me what I thought but a short time ago were good reasons for my father's absence, and for her conduct; and yet now that I know how she regards you, now that I believe that your capture was effected by treachery, I am bewildered."

"I am not," returned Quint, with bold positiveness. "She is the enemy of all of us, your father included. If he returns with his vigilantes he will find no one here, unless——" he ceased speaking, and fixed his eyes on Jovita so strangely that she started and turned pale.

"Unless what?" she demanded.

"Come here and let me whisper the rest in your ear," he said, smilingly, and with affected carelessness.

Surprised at the singularity of the request in the presence of Estelle, Jovita stood still and stared at the young lawyer.

"My regard for a certain person," laying peculiar stress upon the last word, and shifting his gaze for an instant from the Mexican woman to his sweetheart, "makes it necessary that what I desire to say shall remain a secret between us for the present."

A secret!

What woman, high or low, ignorant or intelligent, but what delights in a secret.

Jovita's black eyes twinkled in eager anticipation, as she advanced without more ado toward the prostrate prisoner.

Not the slightest suspicion of danger entered her head.

Quint was bound and helpless, and she was armed and at liberty.

Perhaps a malicious satisfaction in being the recipient of a communication from which the lovely Estelle was debarred, may have contributed to induce her to comply with Quint's request.

She reached his side, stooped over in order that he might whisper the words of mystery into her ear, when two hands came into view like a flash.

One was placed tightly over her mouth; the other seized her by the waist and forced her over upon the ground.

While lying down during the conversation that had followed the departure of his captors, Quint had succeeded in freeing his hands.

But the battle for liberty was not yet over.

His lower limbs were secured at the ankles, and, until the cords that bound them had been removed he could not settle matters satisfactorily with Jovita.

The Mexican woman struggled with all her might to free herself, but without avail, for there was a giant's power in the hands that held her.

Quint looked at Estelle, and was about to speak, when with the quickly uttered words in a low whisper, "I understand," the daughter of the absent detective crawled from her couch of panther skins until her fingers rested upon the cords that bound her lover's ankles.

The work of untying them was slow, for her wrists were bound like her lover's, but at last, with a sigh of thankfulness, she succeeded in her endeavor.

Once assured of the free use of his limbs, the young man said:

"There is a handkerchief in one of the pockets of my coat. Take it out, and place it over this she-devil's face."

Estelle did as requested, though it occupied some time on account of her disadvantages, and when the handkerchief was in the desired position, Quint removed his hand quickly from Jovita's mouth; and then, before she could voice a syllable, she was neatly gagged.

The rest of the work to be performed was easy.

Carmelita's mother was securely bound with the cords that had seen service with the young lawyer; and Estelle's bonds were removed, all without a sound that would probably awaken suspicion in the minds of the bandits outside.

The labor over, Quint with his hands warmly clasping those of Estelle, listened intently.

Not a word could be heard outside but the faint sighing of the wind.

The camp of Vasquez's followers must be close by, and, if so, where were they?

The lovers were about to leave the shelter of the mammoth tree and trust to luck in eluding the vigilance of their enemies, when a pistol shot rang out a few hundred yards up the trail.

The shot was followed by another and another, and groans, curses and exultant cries, strangely mingled, were borne to the ears of the excited listeners.

"It's your father and the vigilantes," whispered Quint. "They have met the bandits and a fight is going on. I must have a hand in it."

She would have endeavored to restrain him from venturing alone in the wood and running the risk of being shot by either foe or friend, but he was out of the tree before the last words had been spoken.

There were more shots, and then suddenly there ensued a short period of profound silence.

It was broken by the rapid approach of a man.

He entered the apartment, a wild look in his eyes, and his breath coming in gasps.

It was Vasquez.

"Come," he said, hoarsely to Estelle, "this is no place for either you or me."

He seized her hand and would have dragged her from the tree had not an arm shot forth from behind, and catching him under the ear sent him staggering across the room.

The rescuer was Jesse James, and there was a murderous light in his eye, when he saw the face of the man he had assaulted.

"At last," he cried, in savage triumph, and his trusty revolver was out in a twinkling.

The California terror closed his eyes, and gave himself up for lost.

Excited shouts from without, and the crack of a pistol, whose bullet grazed the head of the Missouri outlaw, made him pause at the very moment when Vasquez's life hung in the balance.

Involuntarily Jesse James turned his head, and it was well that he did so, for a tall Mexican was within three feet of him, and about to fire his second shot.

There was no time for deliberation.

Dropping his own weapon, Jesse James, with the quickness of thought, sprang forward and caught

the Mexican's arm just as his fingers pressed the trigger.

The bullet flew upward and buried itself in the body of the tree.

An exciting scene followed.

CHAPTER CV.

FRANK JAMES MEETS WITH A REVERSE.

Jesse James forced his murderous assailant through the doorway to the outer air, at the same time calling to Estelle to follow close after him.

The brave girl had picked up the Missouri outlaw's revolver as soon as she saw it drop from his hand, and the use she made of it the instant it came into her possession caused Vasquez, who had started forward, knife in hand, to attack his enemy to come to a sudden halt.

It was then that the Mexican bandit gave his first serious thought to the condition of Jovita.

He was standing over her when she cried out in a hoarse whisper:

"Use your knife to cut my bands, can't you?"

And he was performing this duty, when Estelle glided out of the door upon the heels of Jesse James.

Outside Vasquez and Jovita could hear the sounds of a mighty struggle, in which the crack of a revolver was quickly followed by a groan or a heavy fall in the dry and crackling underbrush.

A yell of triumph from one of his men decided the leader of the bandits upon his course of action.

With a knife in one hand and a pistol in the other, he started for the scene of the conflict.

As he reached the doorway a scream of agony from the throat of a woman pierced his brain like a knife.

As he stood stock-still for a moment, Carmelita, covered with blood, staggered toward him.

The dim light from the lantern within fell upon her face.

Death had set his seal upon it.

Vasquez caught her in his arms as she was falling, and clasping her tightly dashed around the tree, while the shots and cries beyond announced that the fight was still raging, and made good his escape.

Estelle had reached the open air, after her exit from the tree and was hesitating as to which way she should go, when her father suddenly appeared.

He was overjoyed to find her safe.

"This place is dangerous," he said, "and I must get you out of it at once."

As they pushed their way beyond the trail into the chaparral that lined the hillside, they came upon an open space and stumbled and nearly fell over an obstacle lying against the bushes.

Estelle turned to look at it, and then uttered a cry of horror.

The obstruction was the body of a man, and the man was probably dead.

Wrayburn shivered as his gaze became riveted upon the motionless form.

"Who is he?" Estelle asked in a faint voice, and pressing her hands tightly against her heart.

The moon was shining still, but the body was in deep shadow, thrown by the tall tree that loomed up darkly above them.

"Some Mexican robber, probably," her father returned.

"I must know who he is," she said, faintly, and, summoning all her courage to meet the worst.

"Then I'll strike a light," returned Wrayburn.

His fingers trembled as he held a lighted match over the prostrate man's face.

The eyes were closed, and the forehead was bloody, and yet with one look Estelle gave utterance to a cry of joy.

The man was not Graham Quint, as she had feared.

"I thought it was a bandit; I hoped it was Vasquez," said the detective, half-musingly; "but it's no such luck for me. A friend has been stricken down, one that performed valiant services for the vigilantes to-night?"

The man was Frank James.

CHAPTER CVI.

JOVITA'S PECULIAR ACTIONS.

The shots outside the tree had ceased, and all was still as the grave, before Jovita, the Mexican woman, left her position of security.

She had not followed Vasquez out of the natural apartment, for dodging bullets was not to her taste, and she had not seen Carmelita, nor knew that she was mortally wounded.

There was an expression of savage vindictiveness on her dark face, as she stepped cautiously forth.

"I'll kill him, kill him!" she hissed. "I'll kill him the first time I meet him, though I hang for it the next moment. The wretch, the monster, the coward!"

She did not stop to consider that she had given Quint great provocation for his harsh measures, and that she had acted in such a manner toward himself and his friends that force for the attainment of the right had become imperative.

But soon her mind reverted to Dick Wrayburn, and she smiled softly as she murmured his name in tones that, though not of hate, could scarcely be construed into those of admiration.

"And Dick's money will be my money. I wonder," she mused, "if this cowardly Quint guesses that I want him out of the way because he is too intimate with Dick, and with his pale-faced daughter."

Soon she was on her way to the cave.

The moonlight fell full upon the entrance, as she came within view of it, and it also shone full in the face of the man whose wife she desired to be.

"I have been expecting you," said Wrayburn, as she approached.

His tone was earnest and friendly.

It was evident that he still trusted her.

"Where are your friends, the vigilantes?" she asked, curtly.

"Scattered far and wide."

"Then Vasquez's band were the victors?"

"No. We routed the bandits. The boys scattered for the purpose of capturing the few who escaped."

He was about to say more, when a suspicious sound in the bushes near at hand made him pause.

"Quick—into the cave!" he whispered, commandingly. "I will attend to the fellow, if he be a foe."

Jovita glided away silently, leaving the detective to await the arrival of the oncomer.

As he crouched behind some low bushes by the cavern's entrance, a man's head appeared from behind a rock, alongside of which ran the trail down the cañon.

His features were bloody, and yet were recognizable.

Dick Wrayburn started violently.

For the man was Frank James or his ghost.

A moment later and Jesse's brother, or his materialized spirit, stood in front of the cave, and was preparing to enter when the detective arose to his feet to greet him.

At this moment and before a word could be spoken, a pistol bullet sped on a bloody mission.

The report had not died away before Dick Wrayburn fell forward to the earth.

He had been shot while in the act of extending the hand of friendship to Frank James, and the shot had come from some spot close at hand.

As he fell, Jovita rushed from the cave, to be instantly seized by the outlaw from Missouri, who was no ghost, but a live, strong and resolute man.

It did not take long for Frank James to place the desperate and dangerous Mexican woman in a position that rendered her struggles unavailing.

He was in the act of binding her wrists when Vasquez stepped into view.

He still bore in his arms the lifeless body of Carmelita.

Vasquez, with surprising quickness, dropped his burden rudely to the ground, and sprang upon his enemy before Frank could remove his hands from the person of Jovita.

The latter, upon finding herself at liberty, at once turned her attention to Dick Wrayburn, being wholly unaware of the fact that her daughter lay

dead on the ground, not twenty feet away from her.

She was engaged in the work of reviving him—he had been stunned by the shot, not severely hurt—when Vasquez and Frank James, locked in each other's arms, rolled past her and down the hill, which at this point was steep and devoid of other shrubbery than an occasional patch of dry sagebrush.

On their downward course they encountered a large rock, and Frank James' head striking against the edge of it with a painful thud made him involuntarily relax his grasp on his wary opponent.

But still he kept on rolling, and he soon felt that he was rolling by himself.

Once more Vasquez had escaped. Surely he seemed to bear a charmed life.

Dick Wrayburn was rubbing his eyes and looking gratefully at Jovita, never suspecting that she had fired the shot that brought him down, though she had meant to kill Frank James, not her would-be husband, when a cry from far down the hill caused him to rise unsteadily to his feet.

Then the voice of Frank James was heard.

Leaving Jovita with a few hasty words, Wrayburn hurried to the Missourian's assistance.

He had not far to go. Under a large madrona, a quarter of a mile down the cañon, the brother of Jesse James was found astride of a man, with his fingers gripping the captive's throat.

The detective, coming closer, saw that the man's face was in the dust.

With one quick movement he turned the captive over, and his features were then clearly disclosed.

"This chap is wounded," said Wrayburn. "He must have been in the fight down at the big tree."

"Which I wasn't," growled the prisoner. "I got my skin peppered up at the cave by a galoot of a lawyer named Squint."

"Quint shot you," exclaimed the detective. "How did that happen?"

The man with the panther-skin suit told his story without much exaggeration.

"And you are the party," said Frank James, "who shot at my friend, Mr. Wrayburn, up at the hill a short time ago."

Jovita's part in that murderous proceeding was not suspected.

"I am not," replied the man. "Search me and you will find no weapons. Search Squint when you see him and you will find the gun and the knife he robbed me of up above."

"The fact that you are unarmed now doesn't prove anything," spoke the detective. "You might have thrown your gun away."

"What would I throw it away for?" contemptuously. "Do you take me for a bloomin' idiot? If I had shot at a man and he pursued me, wouldn't I

have kept my pop for self-protection? Go and take a bath, Dick Wrayburn. You are losing your grip."

"So you know me, then?" gazing intently into the bandit's face.

"Cert. Wasn't you one of us for a time? I know you, though you've changed your make-up since the old times. Don't you remember the Lone Tree Fakir?"

"Yes," responded the detective, "I do remember you, for you came in from Lone Tree the day Bronco Bill was put in irons on suspicion of being a spy."

"Bronco Bill was a thoroughbred, and I was sorry when I heard that he had petered out."

The fakir was silent a moment.

Then he said to the detective, as a sudden thought struck him:

"You are sweet on Jovita, I am told."

"Who told you?" sharply.

"The old cat herself."

"You don't like her, then?"

"No, do you?"

"I like her, but I cannot love her."

"Do you intend to marry her?"

"No."

Dick Wrayburn spoke with decision.

The answer seemed to please the fakir.

"Well, then, as you're not spoons on her, I'll give you a dead pointer. Look out for her. She's got her eye on your money, and she hopes to corral it. She is also scheming to put both Squint, the lawyer, and your daughter out of the way."

"My daughter! Preposterous."

"You won't believe me, eh? Well, you'll find out mighty soon whether I am right or not. Where is your daughter now?"

"Up at the cave. I left her inside when I came away. There was no other place in these hills where I could bestow her to-night."

"Get back to that cave as quick as the Lord'll let you. I am not in this bandit business any more, and I'm shouting for your good."

Dick Wrayburn turned pale as the first doubt of Jovita's honesty entered his mind.

And yet if she were such a fiend, why had she sent him after the vigilantes?

Ah! There was one explanation for this action of hers, which had never yet occurred to him.

She had sent him after the stern-faced men of San Ygnacio, in order that they might fall into a trap.

And there had been an ambush.

Yes, and the ambush would have resulted disastrously for the vigilantes if the bandits had not been attacked from the rear by Jesse and Frank James and Graham Quint.

The wounded bandit was left as he was, and the two friends hurried back to the cavern.

Jovita was not there to greet them, and the cave was tenantless.

But pinned to a small bush near the entrance was a sheet of white notepaper.

Frank James lighted a match—the moonlight would not serve his purpose here—and read as follows:

MR. WRAYBURN:—Your daughter is in my keeping. Do not search for her, but trust in me. You shall hear from me after my daughter's burial.

JOVITA.

They looked about for the body of Carmelita.

It was not in the cave, nor in the open space in front of it.

"Vasquez has been here again," said Frank James to the sorely-stricken father.

"Yes."

"Then we'll get him and rescue your daughter at the same time."

Dick Wrayburn looked with sad, incredulous eyes at the Missouri outlaw.

"You don't understand how that double game can be worked, eh? Well, I'll show you when daybreak comes. When a man packs a woman, dead or alive, for any distance in the hills, through bushes and brush of a night, he leaves a trail that a novice in woodcraft could follow. Now, I'm no novice."

The detective's face brightened.

"Then you believe that you can track the bandit to his lair?"

"I do."

"I'll wait patiently, then, for daybreak."

While they conversed Jesse James and Graham Quint hove into view.

They had escaped without a scratch, but were worn out with their exertions.

The party retired to the cave for further consultation.

CHAPTER CVII.

A MURDEROUS ATTACK.

The unfortunate happenings of the night had a most exasperating effect upon the mind of the young lawyer.

His enemies had triumphed after all, though the fight down the cañon had gone against them.

Estelle was, no doubt, a prisoner, for she was in the hands of Jovita, and Jovita was his remorseless enemy, and she had also planned to murder his sweetheart.

He was in no mood for sleep, though physically worn out, and after the wounded fakir had been brought to the cave and an examination by Wrayburn, who was something of a surgeon, had shown that the bullet fired from Quint's pistol had done but little damage, the four friends sat down on a pile of skins in a grotto lighted by a lantern, and talked over

the matters which were of the gravest interest to them.

Before sunrise they were on the move.

Frank James' woodcraft came into good play.

Like an Indian, he followed the trail left by the Mexican woman, Vasquez and the captive girl, until it brought them to the mammoth tree by the creek.

And there, by the entrance, Wrayburn picked up another note from Jovita, addressed to him, and stating that he would find his daughter half a mile from the place, up the cañon, at the mouth of a deserted mining tunnel.

The writing of the note went to show that the Mexican woman believed that the detective would disregard the wish expressed in the note left at the cave, and would at once start in search of Estelle.

Upon reading it, the cloud on Wrayburn's brow lifted.

His faith in Jovita's honesty began to return.

Jesse James was of the opinion that the note was written at the instigation of Vasquez to lead the party into a trap.

"But, trap or no trap, I'm going to see this thing through," he said, with grim resolution. "Neither this cowardly Greaser nor any man that walks in shoe leather can put up a bluff to scare me."

Frank James nodded his head approvingly.

"I'm with you, gentlemen," said the detective.

And, without making a stop, they proceeded on their dangerous journey.

While they went swiftly on with stern, determined faces, Estelle was having a most exciting experience.

When she was left alone in the cave by her father her mind became filled with dire forebodings.

She had given Wrayburn Jesse James' pistol, which she had picked up in the mammoth redwood, as it was too heavy for her to carry with ease, or to conveniently bestow about her person; but her utterly defenseless condition did not occur to her until she had been alone for some minutes.

She did not speak to Jovita when the latter entered the cave, and she did not venture forth when the shots were fired for fear of incurring some new danger.

It was a long time—so it seemed to her—after her father had departed, when she heard her name called from the outside in an earnest whisper.

Not doubting that Wrayburn had returned, she hurried to the mouth of the cavern, to be grasped by a man of powerful arm, whom she instantly assumed to be Vasquez.

She was taken so completely by surprise that the thought of resistance did not occur to her until she was powerless to help herself.

Her enemy spoke not a word, but he lost no time in action.

Assisted by one of his followers, Vasquez bore her to the deserted mining tunnel.

Here in a large underground chamber, hollowed out of the earth and propped with timbers, a short distance from the mouth, she passed a sleepless night.

When morning came, several bandits—the few who had escaped with their lives after the furious and bloody struggle of the night—looked in upon her, but she saw nothing of the man she most dreaded.

Jovita was with her, had made her appearance a few moments after Estelle's arrival at the tunnel, and had never left her since.

The daughter of the detective had not been restricted in the use of her limbs since her entrance into the underground chamber, for the outlet was guarded by a bandit, and Jovita, armed and resolute as a man, was her companion.

The Mexican woman had entered into no explanation regarding her conduct. She did not even inform Estelle that Carmelita was dead; but the glances that she cast at the girl from time to time served to deepen the impression in the latter's mind that Jovita was an enemy, and a dangerous one.

Breakfast had been eaten, and Estelle, with her fine, healthy organism, gained hope and courage after her morning refreshment.

She believed that her father and her lover were seeking her, but she resolved not to calmly await their coming, but to make an effort to escape at the first opportunity.

Her look of resignation, assumed to deceive Jovita, caused the latter to remark:

"You are expecting your father and that fellow Quint, I presume?"

Unmindful of the sneer which accompanied these words, Estelle quietly responded:

"I am waiting for them, and I believe they will find me."

Jovita looked at her queerly, but made no reply.

Since the death of Carmelita her hate of Estelle had intensified.

She had wept but little upon discovering that her daughter was no more, for she was of a strange disposition.

In her were still waters which ran deep.

Presently Jovita arose, and walked toward the mouth of the tunnel.

A short time she stood there gazing moodily out at the landscape.

Then she turned and once more fixed her dark and somber eyes upon the fair prisoner.

Estelle sat with her hands folded, and her head bowed upon her breast.

With the low exclamation, "Humph!" Jovita passed out into the sunlight, nodding carelessly to the guard, and left Estelle alone.

"Now," thought the lovely girl, as the color leaped to her cheeks, "now is my opportunity."

Near where she sat was a piece of straw matting, about a yard square.

Underneath it were planks covering a hole, some twenty feet in depth, which had been dug for experimental purposes by the original owner of the mine.

With beating heart Estelle waited silently for some moments, and then, hearing nothing but the occasional movement of the sentinel, arose quickly, and noiselessly removed the matting from the boards.

A plan of escape had entered her mind, which might succeed, if Jovita were not near at hand, and if she had but the one bandit outside to contend with.

The planks were next removed, and carried to a corner and covered with various articles of cast-off clothing picked up from the floor.

This done, she replaced the matting over the hole.

Now, for the experiment which promised so much to her.

In her chair, placed directly behind the matting and on a line with the outlet, she seated herself and gave utterance to a series of moans that were meant to indicate the greatest physical distress.

The guard, a stout grizzled Mexican, heard the moans and rushed quickly in.

He saw Estelle with her hand pressed against her heart, and her face contracted, seemingly in intense pain.

Without a thought of treachery or deceit, he dashed forward, struck the matting with his feet and then shot down out of sight in the twinkling of an eye.

Paler than any ghost, but with the light of undying determination in her eyes, Estelle, upon the instant of the guard's descent, rushed for the open air.

She stopped not a minute when she found herself outside the tunnel, she looked neither to the right nor the left, but with the fleetness of a deer sped down the trail which led to the mammoth tree.

She had not gone more than a few hundred yards when her absence was discovered.

The yells of the trapped bandit in the hole had brought some of his comrades, who had been playing cards in the shade of a tree a short distance away, and upon his excited explanation of what had occurred, a pursuit was instantly undertaken.

Estelle heard the threatening shouts behind her, but her fear served to lend wings to her flight.

She fairly flew over the ground, and the shots that were fired to scare her only made her clench her hands and close her lips the more tightly.

But she was beginning to feel that she could not run much longer, when to her ineffable joy she saw ahead of her the form of the man she loved, and with

him her father and the Johnson brothers, otherwise the James boys.

While her heart throbbed with happiness and her eyes, filled with deepest love, were fixed upon the flushed and beaming face of the handsome young lawyer, a shot was fired from one side of the trail, up a high bank, which caused Dick Wrayburn to stagger and fall.

Estelle looked up on the instant of the report, and so did the James boys and Quint, and they saw the savagely triumphant face of Vasquez, and close behind him the pale and scared countenance of Jovita.

While the afflicted girl was on her knees, supporting her father's head, Quint and the James boys were in swift pursuit of the assassin and his companions.

But they found no trace of them, so suddenly and mysteriously did they disappear, and they saw not a single bandit in the hills.

They would have continued the search farther, but the probably serious condition of the wounded man and the danger that might beset Estelle, induced them to turn back after they had gone about a mile.

Wrayburn's eyes were open when the trio came up.

"Who shot me?" he asked faintly of Quint.

"Vasquez."

"I—I thought as much. Was he alone?"

"No. That she devil Jovita was with him."

"Then she is a traitress," he gasped, and fainted.

CHAPTER CVIII.

JOVITA MAKES A PROPOSITION.

A few days after the occurrences related in the last chapter, while Graham Quint and Jesse James were sitting in the living-room of Dick Wrayburn's cottage, there came a sharp knock at the door.

Estelle opened it, and to her amazement confronted Jovita.

The Mexican woman, without a word, pushed by her and walked in.

Utterly ignoring the presence of the two men, she passed by them and entered the bedroom where the detective lay seriously wounded.

He had had a close shave for his life, for Vasquez's bullet had missed the heart by a hair.

Rushing up to the bed, the Mexican woman fell on her knees, and murmuring Wrayburn's name, told him between her sobs that he must get well for her sake.

"You think I have deceived you," she cried, loud enough for those in the adjoining room to hear. "You wrong me, for I tried to prevent the firing of the shot."

Wrayburn appeared to be satisfied with her explanation.

"But my daughter?" he presently said in an anx-

ious voice. "You do not like her. How can I trust you with that feeling in your heart?"

"Get well," she answered, "and Estelle shall have nothing further to fear from me. Get well," she repeated, "for I have a great surprise in store for you."

Just then the surgeon came in.

Jovita remained but a few moments longer.

As she re-entered the living-room, Graham Quint arose to his feet for the purpose of preventing her exit from the house.

"You need not stop me," she said, earnestly, "for I have business with you and with this gentleman," bowing slightly to Jesse James, "That business," she continued, as the young lawyer looked at her with contemptuous incredulity, "relates to Vasquez."

"Then you have no liking for him, now?" queried Quint, experimentally.

"I hate him!"

"Ah!" put in Jesse James. "Then you should not have allowed him to shoot Dick Wrayburn."

"I allow him!" she excitedly replied, her bosom heaving with strong emotion. "Merciful Heaven! Do you think I had anything to do with that matter?"

"You were by his side when the shot was fired," answered Jesse, coldly.

"After the shot had been fired, I was by his side. I was not with him before. He is no friend of mine any more. I saw him crouched behind some bushes. I divined his purpose, and I tried to reach him in time to save Senor Wrayburn, but fate was against me. You must believe me, senors," she cried, passionately.

She paused a moment to recover her breath, and then earnestly continued:

"I will prove to you that I could not have seconded Vasquez in his murderous design, by delivering him into your hands."

"That's business," remarked Jesse James, emphatically.

"When can you do this?" asked Quint, eagerly.

"To-morrow. I must first make all necessary preparations, so that there may be no hitch in the programme. The villain tried to kill my friend, he is responsible for the death of my daughter, and I care not what punishment you inflict upon him when once you get him into your power."

Her tones had the ring of truth in them.

She took her leave, promising to call on the morrow.

As soon as she had mounted the horse, which had brought her to town, and was out of sight of the house, Jesse James snapped his fingers and said, hurriedly:

"That for her promises. I am going to shadow her."

Quint made no objection, for he had serious

doubts himself as to the sincerity of the senora's protestations.

The task of following her was an easy one, for she rode toward the hills without once looking behind her.

Two hours' ride, and Jesse James, now on foot, saw her dismount in front of a squatter's cabin in a small valley.

A masked man appeared at the door to meet her. "That is Vasquez, for a thousand dollars," said Jesse James. "Now, to pin the cunning senora to the wall. I must overhear what they say to each other before putting in my own oar; so I may be able to tell Dick Wrayburn a story that he will believe."

He noiselessly started for the cabin, and without betraying his proximity, obtained an excellent position for listening purposes under the small window on one side, the upper sash of which was lowered.

Vasquez it was, and his first words were:

"Do you think they will bite?"

"Yes. I'll have both of them here to-morrow. Now, for this Manton business. Are you sure the paymaster will start day after to-morrow?"

"Yes."

"Tell me all you have heard."

Paymaster meant money.

Jesse James pricked up his ears.

His old lawless spirit of greed was aroused, and, forgetting all caution, he raised his head to peer through the glass.

As he did so, he encountered the steady gaze of his mortal enemy.

The Missouri outlaw was about to duck his head when a bullet cut the glass and whizzed past his ear.

CHAPTER CIX.

JOVITA GETS THE BETTER OF QUINT.

When the bullet sped by Jesse James' head he turned from the window, and, whipping out his revolver, made a dash for the door in front.

It was too late to retreat, and he was not that kind of a man, either.

He must make a bold fight for his life, and he was ready for the emergency.

The door was open, and Jovita stood upon the threshold.

"Too late!" she hissed in her rage, but whether directed toward him or Vasquez, Jesse could not say. "He has gone; he flew out of the door before you turned the corner."

"Which way did he go?"

"This way," pointing toward some bushes a few feet away.

Jesse James hesitated for one brief moment.

Time was of the utmost importance to him, and yet he must do nothing rashly.

"Excuse me," he said, coldly, and, pushing his way past her, entered the cabin.

Vasquez was not there.

Jovita had not lied, then, as to the bandit's flight. But had she told the truth as to the direction he had taken?

He found himself in a dilemma, as he rapidly thought the matter over.

If he took the route pointed out in pursuit of Vasquez, he might find himself on a wild-goose chase, or, worse still, might be drawn into ambush.

Jovita watched him, as he hurried toward the bushes she had indicated, and then hurriedly made preparations for her own departure from the place.

It was late in the afternoon when she turned a corner of the road—she was on horseback—and saw the town of San Ygnacio in the near distance.

But she saw something else besides the town.

She saw an approaching horseman.

As he came near, she observed, with a frown, that it was Graham Quint.

He approached and reined up his horse when close by her side.

Her own animal had also come to a standstill.

"I am very sorry to be obliged to adopt harsh measures toward a woman," he said, gravely; "but you must consider yourself my prisoner."

"I will explain," she began, tremulously, for she feared the young lawyer as much as she hated him.

"You are very good at explaining," he coolly interrupted; "but there are some matters in which I have taken part which you can never explain to your credit with me as the judge. A jury may accept your story, but I cannot."

She made a quick motion toward her side, but the muzzle of a pistol was close to her face before she could execute her evident design.

"Don't try to oppose me," came the stern, menacing utterance, "or I may forget that you are a woman."

Jovita shivered and let the hand that had made the suggestive movement rest on the pommel of her saddle.

"Wait a moment," came from her lips, faintly, "and let me think."

She bit her lip and tried to evolve from her confused brain some scheme that might promise her immunity from arrest.

Presently a hopeful light shone in her dark eyes.

"What charge do you propose making against me?" she asked.

"There are quite a number of offenses that might be successfully laid at your door," he said. "Robbery, attempted murder, abduction, and conspiracy."

"You cannot prove that I ever robbed any one," she retorted, defiantly.

"It can be proved that the band of which you are

a member has committed robberies almost without number," he replied, "and in law all are alike guilty."

To his surprise she seemed relieved at this statement.

But in a moment her face grew grave and anxious.

"And abduction? Whom have I abducted?"

"Miss Wrayburn, or gave your assistance to the villainous action, which amounts to the same thing."

"Miss Wrayburn!" The utterance of the name caused Jovita's face to clear in an instant.

She thought she saw a way out of her difficulty.

"You love the young lady, do you not?"

"Yes, he answered, steadily, "I do love her, and it is because I love her that her enemies are my enemies."

"Her father has some claim to your respect and consideration, has he not?"

"Yes."

"Then let me inform you that Richard Wrayburn is my dear friend; that, in fact, he is my affianced husband; that he believes in me fully, and that he knows I am not an enemy of Estelle."

"But your conduct toward her? Your expressions of hate to me? No, no, senora, you cannot hoodwink a lawyer, though you may succeed with a layman."

"If you arrest me," she cried, desperately, "you will prevent the capture of Vasquez, for you know I have promised to deliver him into your hands. I cannot explain my past actions now," as she saw that he hesitated; "but before long you shall know that my object in remaining with the bandits was not for the purpose of lawbreaking."

She spoke impetuously, and apparently with the deepest earnestness and feeling.

Quint allowed the pistol hand to drop to his side, but, on the moment of this action, Jovita's right hand, whose recent occupation he had failed to notice, came up with something shining and murderously suggestive in it.

It was her own revolver, and, like a flash, she flung it at his head. Before Quint could realize her intention, he received a blow which sent him reeling from the saddle.

A wicked, triumphant laugh greeted his ears, as Jovita, quickly wheeling her horse, dashed up the road in the direction of the cabin, which she had left but a short time before.

CHAPTER CX.

A BOLD ROBBERY IS PLANNED.

Twenty-four hours passed.

Jovita did not fulfill her promise to call at Wrayburn's house, and outline her plan for delivering the dreaded Mexican bandit into the hands of his enemies.

Frank and Jesse James took a walk late in the afternoon.

Both were disgusted with the ill-luck they had had in the Vasquez chase.

"We wanted that reward, and we may stay here a year and be as far off from getting it as we are now," growled Frank, who was not a growler by nature.

"I've got a scheme," said Jesse, "that will put money in our purses, and at the same time give us a chance to do a little of the old-time business."

"You mean robbery? What is it?" asked his brother, with quickened interest.

Jesse was not averse to playing a virtuous rôle now and then, but he had tired of the part he had been playing lately.

True, the detective was a good fellow, but he was a detective after all.

"My scheme," replied Jesse, "is neither more nor less than the robbery of the paymaster of Joel Manton, the great cattle king of Southern California."

The words spoken by Vasquez in the squatters' cabin had given the Missouri outlaw an idea, which he was not slow to act upon when he arrived in San Ygnacio after an unsuccessful search in the hills for the Mexican bandit.

By inquiries, carefully made, he learned that Manton's paymaster would pass through the town two days hence on his way to a cattle camp twenty miles distant.

Coupled with this was the further intelligence that the paymaster would carry with him over forty thousand dollars in gold and bills, with which to pay off the large number of Manton's employees, who were to assemble at the camp on the day in question.

Jesse James determined to rob the paymaster before he reached his destination, and when he broached the scheme to his brother, the latter's comment was quick and decisive.

"I'm with you to the last ditch."

The fact that the custodian of the money would go on his way attended by a guard of five resolute men,

cowboys at that, did not cause the James boys to shrink from the undertaking.

They were ready to encounter greater odds than that with such a treasure at stake.

Jesse James also had every reason to believe that Vasquez meant to attack the paymaster's party, but he hoped to forestall the bandit in this enterprise.

And he believed he could effect his purpose by fixing upon a spot about three miles from San Ygnacio, where the road made a sharp turn around a huge boulder near the bank of a creek.

Concealed behind this boulder, the James boys, armed to the teeth, would be able, so they hoped, to make such a sudden onslaught upon the six men of the treasure party, that resistance on their part would be practically useless.

"We'll stand by the racket, no matter what happens," said Jesse, grimly.

The conversation of the twain had been carried on at intervals for over an hour, and when the plan for the bold robbery had been fully arranged, they found themselves on the outskirts of the town and at the foot of a long hill.

It was close upon dusk, and they were about to retrace their steps, when, looking up the hill, they saw some animate object crawling painfully in the middle of the road toward them.

It was not an animal Jesse James decided, after a long scrutiny, and, if it was a human being, it was certainly acting in a most peculiar manner.

As it came nearer, the brothers saw that it was a woman, and, as they hurried to meet it, the ghastly countenance of the Mexican woman, Jovita, looked at them from a mass of dust and blood.

"Good!" she gasped, when they stopped in front of her, "I've found some one, as I hoped I would, and you"—nodding her head at Jesse—"best of all."

"What has happened? You are hurt. Who did it?"

These questions were asked rapidly.

Jovita raised herself on an arm, and said with great difficulty:

"Vasquez, the cowardly hound who shot Dick Wrayburn—he has murdered me—ah!" with a gasp, "I shall not live to tell it."

She sank back in the road.

Jesse James drew a flask from his pocket, and poured some of the strong contents down her throat.

As he stooped over her, he saw that the back of her head was a mass of gore.

The liquor revived the wounded woman, and again sitting up, she tried to finish her story:

"I really meant to deliver him up to the officers or any one who wanted him," she said, "because he shot the only man I ever loved. Yes, I loved Richard Wrayburn, though I schemed to put his daughter out of the way, in order that she might not take any of the money, which I desired should belong to myself and my husband. Tell him I am sorry for my wickedness, and that I want him to think as kindly of me as he can."

She paused a few moments to gain breath.

"Vasquez discovered in some way that I intended to betray him," she continued, "and, early this afternoon, he taunted me with my treachery. I was in no mood for soft speeches, and I gave him as good as he sent. It was when I called him a coward that he shot me here"—pressing her hand to her left breast—"and, when I fell, he jumped upon me and kicked me in the body, in the head, everywhere, it seemed, until I lost consciousness. When I recovered my senses, I crawled to the road, and then kept on crawling until now."

Jesse gritted his teeth, and looked at his brother.

Frank's brow was as black as night.

"And now I want to tell you," Jovita painfully went on, "that to-morrow Vasquez, with three of his men, will attack Manton's paymaster about ten miles from here. If you want to save that money for the men for whom it is intended, and capture the coward and murderer at the same time, the opportunity will be given you. Notify the vigilantes, work cautiously, and you will not only assist in avenging me, but you will be doing all good people a service."

She said but little more, and that was in the way of repetition.

The James boys stayed with her until she died, and, after removing the body to a spot in the brush, walked slowly back to town.

Before they reached Wrayburn's house, where they were staying at the detective's request, they had decided not to notify the vigilantes, or to say anything to anybody concerning Jovita or Vasquez.

Their original programme would be carried out, but an addition would be made to it.

They would attack the paymaster at the locality previously selected; and then, having secured the

booty, would ride on to the spot where Vasquez, according to Jovita, would be awaiting the arrival of the paymaster, and, falling upon him, "tooth and nail," would forever settle the score they had laid up against him.

The day came on which the robbery was to be attempted.

The paymaster arrived in San Ygnacio, as predicted, and with him five able-bodied cowboys, well mounted and armed with revolvers and rifles.

The paymaster, a little man of slight frame, but with the grit of a bulldog, rode in a covered wagon, which was his bed by night—for the party had traveled by road all the way from Stockton.

Jesse and Frank James were at the hotel when the party stopped for breakfast, but when the members had refreshed themselves and were ready to resume the journey, the two Missourians were not in the town.

Having assured themselves that the way was open for the performance of their lawless and desperate undertaking, they rode swiftly to the ambush by the boulder at the curve in the road.

There were thick woods about them, and they found no difficulty in secreting their horses.

Comfortably ensconced behind the big rock, they waited calmly for the coming of the paymaster's party.

An hour passed by, and they were beginning to wonder why their quarry was so slow in putting in an appearance, when the crackling of twigs and the low hum of voices across the creek, which flowed a few feet beyond the road in front of them, arrested their attention, and made them conscious of a sudden danger to their nefarious plans.

They did not stir from their position of concealment, for the steps came nearer, the voices became louder and clearer.

Soon the head of a man was seen peering through the alders that lined the opposite bank of the creek.

Jesse James gave a start that well-nigh betrayed his presence.

For the newcomer was Vasquez.

CHAPTER CXI.

THE ATTACK ON THE PAYMASTER.

Cattle-king Manton's paymaster was not over five feet in height, and was possessed of but ordinary muscular strength.

And yet he had been sheriff of a California county at a time when lawlessness was rampant, and so fearlessly had he discharged the duties of his office that, upon his retirement, he was at once selected to take the responsible position of paymaster for Joel Manton, whose cattle ranges covered half the southern part of the State, and whose employees were numbered by hundreds.

Jim Dash accepted the position, and had held it for several years without having met with molestation during any of his periodical journeys.

The well-known fact that he was a dead shot, and that fear was a word unknown in his vocabulary, no doubt had a wholesome influence upon the rough spirits with which the lower country abounded.

And to make his position wholly secure, his employer had for the present trip provided him with a bodyguard of cowboys—a quintet of fighters, whose reputation was State-wide.

But, though the little paymaster had had smooth sailing thus far, the time was soon to come when he was to encounter the worst shock of his life.

As the party moved out of the town in the direction of the mountains, Jim Dash entertained his cowboys, who rode close beside him, with interesting reminiscences of the locality through which they expected to pass.

"There's a high boulder a few miles on," he said, "which I never pass without making ready for an ambush. If a gang of robbers wanted to lay for me, I don't know of a better spot than that."

"Seems to me I have heard the spot mentioned by a stage driver," said one of the cowboys.

"You might," replied the little paymaster, "for a stage was held up there once by Vasquez and his partner. That was several years ago, when the Greaser was new to the plundering and murdering business. He and José Castro stopped the stage, without taking the precaution to mask their faces. The disguise business doesn't matter to Vasquez now, for there's a price on his head, but it did then. Well, they got away with the racket, corraled Wells, Fargo & Co.'s treasure box, and made the passengers jingle up several hundred dollars. No blood was spilled, and the robbers made away in high spirits. The very next day Castro was captured by the sheriff of the county."

"He was hanged, of course," said the cowboy.

"Yes, but not in the legal fashion. The vigilantes

overhauled the sheriff on his way to jail, took his prisoner away from him, and stretched him up to the nearest tree. Vasquez got wind of the affair in time to skip the county."

As the party came in sight of the boulder, Jim Dash drew his revolver.

"Boys," said he, "we might as well be prepared for an attack. I don't know why I should feel queerish just now, but I do. Something is going to happen, as sure as fate."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a rifle bullet struck him in the pistol arm.

The shot did not come from behind or near the boulder, but from the bushes across the creek, and was followed by a volley which killed the two horses attached to the wagon.

Jim Dash, upon the instant, changed his pistol to his left hand, and then leaped from the wagon seat to the ground, dragging the box containing the treasure with him.

Then, under cover of the front wheels, he discharged one chamber of the weapon, and then waited for the head of a bandit to appear, in order that he might bore a hole in it.

But in the fusillade, participated in by cowboys and robbers, which quickly followed, no opportunity was given the little fellow to bring an enemy down.

Their fall was greeted by a yell of savage triumph, and then Vasquez and his three Mexican followers leaped into view.

"Now," thought the plucky paymaster, "is my time."

Taking good aim at Vasquez while the latter was in the act of drawing bead on one of the remaining cowboys, he was about to press the trigger when a bullet from some quarter unknown to him, struck the weapon and knocked it from his hand.

It fell in the dust alongside of one of the dead horses, and he was crawling forward to reach it when rifles cracked alongside of and beyond him, and a cowboy staggered forward, to fall dead upon him and flatten him to the earth.

The first part of the sanguinary battle was over.

CHAPTER CXII.

THE JAMES BOYS GET THE TREASURE.

Jesse James was dumfounded when he saw the face of Vasquez peering through the opening in the bushes across the creek.

His first impulse was to aim at the bandit, and at once settle his account with the California terror.

But cool second thought urged him to pause.

It was all very well to avenge a wrong, real or fancied, but it was not business to allow forty thousand dollars to go a begging, as it were.

No, he would defer his settlement with the bandit, until after the paymaster's party had been attended to.

Frank James' low whisper made him start.

"Jesse, the greaser's coming is the best stroke of luck that could have happened to us just now."

"What do you mean, Frank?"

"I mean that he intends to attack the paymaster at this spot, and that it is to our interest to let him do it."

"Ah, I see!" chuckled Jesse. "Yes, yes," and he rubbed his hands gleefully, "we'll watch him while he blows daylight through the cowboys, and when he has finished his job and is about to sail in and snatch the treasure, we'll come to the center and let daylight through him."

"Yes," returned Frank, "that's the ticket, and if it isn't a daisy I don't want a cent."

For the first time since they had set out on their perilous mission of plunder, they began to feel comfortable. The risks ran, to their bold minds, amounted to little or nothing.

Vasquez and his men would be their cats-paws, and when the chestnuts had been plucked from the fire, they—Frank and Jesse—would jump in and eat them.

The success of the new "wrinkle" lay in the taking of the Mexicans by surprise, and that they should give their enemies a surprise they would never recover from in this life, the brothers had little doubt.

They lay concealed from view, from both the paymaster's party and the ambushed bandits across the creek, when the wagon drove up toward the curve.

Not a move made they until Jim Dash raised his pistol to shoot at Vasquez.

Jesse James did not look to ascertain who the target was.

His present desire was that the Mexicans should triumph over the paymaster and his party, and he, therefore, prevented any loss to the bandit's force by promptly shooting the pistol out of Jim Dash's hand.

He might have killed the little fellow, but for the respect he entertained for his bravery.

He would not probably have been troubled with any such compunctions had he, and not Vasquez, been making the attack at the time.

The volley that made the fourth cowboy bite the dust, and for the time cover the diminutive form of the courageous paymaster, was the cause of the sudden disappearance of the fifth and last member of the bodyguard.

But he had not been killed.

Seeing that further resistance would be useless, and believing that there was but one chance of saving the treasure, he dropped to the ground where his comrade fell, and close beside the box which held the money.

Loud shouts notified him that the murderous assailants were about to cross the creek.

Now was his opportunity, for, owing to the depth of the stream at the point from which the attack had been made, they would be obliged to go up the bank a short distance, in order to effect a safe and easy crossing.

The box contained a larger amount in bills than in hard money, which made his task of carrying it a comparatively easy one.

Raising it in his arms, unseen by either the Mexicans or the James boys, the valiant cowboy darted up the hill on the opposite side of the boulder from the two waiting Missourians, and was making for a clump of chaparral, whose dense growth promised an excellent avenue for concealment, when his foot slipped in the soft, sandy earth, and he fell with such sudden and heavy force that the box slipped from his hands, and rolled away from him.

But it did not roll toward the wagon, for the cowboy had taken a zigzag course up the hill.

On the contrary, it rolled down upon the James boys, to their utter consternation, just at the moment when a succession of fierce yells from Vasquez and his bandits announced that they had crossed the creek, and were making for the wagon for the purpose of looting it.

The brave cowboy, whose mission had failed, raised himself up painfully, just as Vasquez reached the wagon.

He was instantly observed, and a bullet from the bandit's rifle ended his life then and there.

But one live member of the little band that jour-

neyed out of San Ygnacio remained, and that was the paymaster.

He had wriggled himself from under the dead body of the cowboy, which had fallen on him a few minutes before, and when Vasquez fired the shot up the hill, Jim Dash once more raised his pistol and took true aim at the bandit leader's head.

A report followed, and at last Vasquez fell, mortally wounded.

Just then Frank and Jesse James dashed into view. They had engaged in quick work before, and they were ready for the same kind of business now.

Crack! crack! crack! crack! from their repeaters before any of the astounded robbers could make move in defense.

Suddenly a scream, charged with mortal terror, made the brothers look at the wounded Mexican.

He was flinging a writhing something from him.

Jesse and Frank James knew what had happened.

He had been bitten by a rattlesnake, which had crawled from its hole under the boulder while Dash lay on the ground.

And there was no help for him, for the poisonous fangs of the snake had struck into a wound of the arm caused by one of the paymaster's bullets.

In fifteen minutes Vasquez was dead.

"You vile wretch!" exclaimed Jesse James, as the Mexican bandit gave his last gasp. "You die my sight, and I am avenged!"

A look of vindictive triumph spread over the face of the bandit king.

Then, without another word, the James boys turned their attention to the treasure box. After breaking it open and secreting the money about their persons, they brought forth their horses and rode away.

They apprehended no danger to themselves, for they believed that the robbery would be laid to Vasquez's door, and it was—and yet they did not return to San Ygnacio.

One week later they were in San Francisco disguised.

Graham Quint married Estelle, and to-day he is one of the leading lawyers of the Golden State.

Dick Wrayburn is still a widower.

Neither knew till years later that they were on in league with the notorious James boys.

TO BE CONTINUED.

YOUR OPINIONS OF FAMOUS MEN.

Grand Prize Contest



**22 VALUABLE PRIZES
GIVEN AWAY.**

Here is a chance for every reader of **JESSE JAMES WEEKLY**.

Boys, you have all heard of the plucky little Kansan who has been making himself famous on the other side of the world.

What do you think of him?

What characteristics do you see in his face?

What has he done, anyway?

What do you think is the best thing he ever did?

The boys who can best answer such questions applying to any famous American, known for his brave deeds, will win handsome prizes.

Here is the plan of one of the most novel contests ever placed before the American boys.

Look up what interesting facts you can find about any famous American. Then write them out in your own words, stating your own opinion of him, his appearance, and the particular achievement which pleases you the most. The first prize will be awarded to the person sending in the most interesting and best written article; the next best will win the second prize, and so on. It makes no difference how short they are, but no contribution must be longer than 500 words.

LOOK AT THE PRIZES.

TWO FIRST PRIZES

The two who send us the most interesting and best written articles will each receive a first-class Camera, complete with achromatic lens, and loaded with six exposures each. Absolutely ready for use. For square pictures $3\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; capacity six exposures without reloading; size of camera $4\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2} \times 5$ inches; weight 15 ounces; well made, covered with grain leather and handsomely finished.

FIVE SECOND PRIZES

The five who send us the next best articles will each receive a "Sterling" Magic Lantern Outfit, together with 72 admission tickets and a large show bill. Each lantern is 10 inches high, 4 inches in diameter, with a $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch plano-complex condensing lens and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch double complex objective lens. Uses kerosene oil only.

FIVE THIRD PRIZES

The five who send us the next best articles will each receive a Handsome Pearl Handled Knife. These knives have each four blades of the best English steel, hardened and tempered. The handle is pearl, the lining brass, and the bolsters German silver.

For ten next best descriptions, ten sets of the latest and most entertaining Puzzles and Novelties on the market, numbering three puzzles each, including Uncle Isaac's Pawnshop Puzzle; the Magic Marble Puzzle and the Demon Outfit.

This Contest closes December 1. All contributions must be in by that date.

SEND IN YOUR ARTICLES AT ONCE, BOYS.

We are going to publish all of the best ones during the progress of the Contest.

We will have to reserve to ourselves the right of judging which article has the most merit, but our readers know that they may depend upon Street & Smith, and on their absolute fairness and justice in conducting Contests. This one will be no exception to the rule.

REMEMBER!

Whether your contribution wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with the name of the writer.

To become a contestant for the prize you must cut out the **Character Contest Coupon**, printed in this issue. Fill it out properly, and send it to **JESSE JAMES WEEKLY**, care of Street & Smith, 238 William Street, New York City, together with your article. No contribution will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

COUPON.

"JESSE JAMES WEEKLY" CHARACTER CONTEST No. 1.

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CHARACTER PRIZE CONTEST.

During the progress of the Prize Character Contest this department will be devoted to the publication of the best articles sent in by the contestants.

Here are some of the best ones received this week.

The Gallantry of General Grant.

(By Edward Flynn, Everett, Mass.)

Of all Americans noted for their gallant and chivalrous deeds, none occupy or could occupy a higher place than Ulysses S. Grant. In my opinion, he was the ablest general in the Civil War, and the backbone of the Union army.

He was born in Ohio in 1822, and entered West Point at an early age. He entered the army at the outset of the war, and was at once made brigadier-general. Early in 1862 General Grant, with a strong force, captured Fort Henry, on the Tennessee River, after an hour's fighting. The garrison, however, made their escape, and retreated to Fort Donelson. Grant then crossed the river and attacked this strong fortification. The battle lasted three days, but Grant's attack was so strong and vigorous that the garrison attempted to break through the lines and escape to Nashville.

Early next morning the Confederate general sent a flag of truce to Grant, asking what terms of surrender he would accept. Without hesitation or a moment's delay, he answered, "None but unconditional surrender." To this laconic reply he simply added, "I propose to move immediately upon your works." After this he was interpreted, "Unconditional Surrender Grant." Bucknor surrendered with 15,000 men, and the Confederate line of defense was thus broken. This capture won for Grant a major-generalship.

General Grant was first shown to the American people as a hero after the battle of Vicksburg. For two months he endeavored to cut a canal across a short bend in the Mississippi, so as to turn its course away from Vicksburg. Finally he moved his army still farther south, crossed the river, moved northeast, and attacked the stronghold from the east side. The Confederate Army was under the command of General J. E. Johnston, Lee's most skillful general.

Grant attacking Johnston, drove him eastward beyond Jackson. Grant's next move was to return back and lay siege to the town of Vicksburg. Only one result could follow, the Confederates were starved out; and after six

weeks the entire force surrendered. In 1866, Grant was made lieutenant-general, a grade which had been previously held by only Washington and Scott. Two years later—in 1868—he was elected President, and served two terms, being the eighteenth President. President Grant has been usually considered one of the greatest generals the world has ever seen. It might be said that Grant was truly the "Hero of the Rebellion." On his face can be read determination. "His deeds as general, his statesmanship as President, and his example as an American citizen, have raised his country to a higher position in the civilized world."

The Father of Our Country.

(By Glen Harper, Elins, W. Va.)

The fame of George Washington is known all over the world. The first honorable act of his life which brought him into public notice was his mission to the French commander at Veango. He excelled in athletic sports, such as horsemanship, jumping, climbing, etc. At the natural bridge in Virginia the walls of rock rise about 200 feet in height and is most difficult to climb. His name may still be read on those walls of rock. He climbed higher than any of his companions, and cut it with his hunting knife. After his mission to Venango he began a small fort south of Fort Du Quesne, called Fort Necessity, but the French came in a large force and compelled him to surrender it.

On one occasion he was passing a house where he saw several men jumping. Being a jumper himself, he went in and found the man of the house had offered his girl as a wife to the one who could jump farthest. Then Washington took his turn at jumping and beat them all. It was then decided Washington had won. He would not accept the girl, but said he was jumping for the fun of it and not for the girl.

The second Continental Congress, which met May 10, 1775, appointed Washington commander-in-chief. The appointment took place on the 15th of June, 1775. He received his commission four days later. Early in March, 1776, Washington seized Dorchester Heights

Washington then gave Howe his pleasure of withdrawing his forces from town (Boston) or having them battered to pieces. Howe left March 17, St. Patrick's Day, 1776, for Halifax. Congress voted Washington a gold medal to commemorate a bloodless victory. Washington entered the presidential chair March 30, 1789. And held two terms, ending 1793. He died during Adams' administration, December 14, 1799.

The Battle of Princeton.

(By George Hoffman, Millville, N. J.)

On Christmas night, 1776, Washington crossed the Delaware River full of floating ice and marched on Trenton in a furious snow storm, and surprised a body of Hessian soldiers and took them prisoners with a large amount of arms and ammunition, and never lost a man. Then he outwitted Cornwallis. Cornwallis had left part of his army at Princeton, and had started after Washington and found him between Trenton and the Delaware. That night he went to sleep, thinking Washington could not escape him, because of his army being in front of him and the river in back. He told his soldiers he would bag the old fox in the morning, but while he was asleep Washington, like an old fox, crept around him and got to Princeton. In that battle the American advancing force was driven back. Just then Washington came up. At the head of his army he marched within thirty yards of the British and he stood and fought between two fires and once was covered up by smoke, and both sides thought he was shot, but when the smoke cleared away he was there without a scratch to show.

Captain John Smith, Who Saved a Colony.

(By George Adams, Danbury, Conn.)

Captain John Smith was born in England in the year 1579. He was an English explorer and was the founder of Virginia. His word was law among the colonists, for if they could not settle a debate among themselves, they always came to him for advice. He had been through so many dangers and had had such wonderful escapes that they seemed miraculous.

The first settlers that landed at Jamestown, Virginia, in the year 1609 were not the kind of people who would be able to settle an active and prosperous colony, because they were people that could not stand hardship and toil.

Most of them were gentlemen who had lost their fortunes and had come to America to seek riches. They had been induced by men who were interested in the London Company to come to this country for that purpose. Most of the men had never done any amount of hard work, and they were unwilling to learn.

If they had not had a man who knew how to govern a colony along with them they would have certainly perished.

In their trouble the people asked Captain John Smith to be their leader, and they soon found out that they had selected the right man for such a position. Smith traded with the Indians, and in that way he obtained enough food to supply the colonists. He then made them build their own houses, and cultivate the land and plant corn.

Smith enjoyed roaming about the new country and making discoveries. He was captured by the Indians on one occasion, while out on one of his expeditions. He was taken before their king, Powhattan, and condemned to die. He was about to be put to death when the king's daughter, Pocahontas, begged her father to spare him. So his life was spared, and he was sent back to Jamestown.

Pocahontas became a friend to the whites and afterward married a young Englishman whose name was John Rolfe.

Smith did a great deal of exploring which was of great value to the people of England, because it taught them more about the new world. A few years after the settlement of Jamestown, Smith was seriously injured by an explosion of gunpowder, and so he returned to England. This was a terrible blow to the colonists, for they did not do any work after he was gone; and during the winter most of them died of starvation. Only a few were alive when spring came, and they were about to sail away when some ships, commanded by Lord Delaware, an English officer, arrived with food and new colonists, and so the colony was saved.

Afterwards the settlers learned to be more industrious and were no longer in danger of starving. Captain John Smith's wisdom had saved this colony, and they were greatly indebted to him. He died in the year 1631.

Colonel Morgan, a Hero of the Revolution.

(By Luke O'Malley, Jersey City, N. J.)

If we wish to find true heroes we must go back to the days of our fight for Independence, the war of the Revolution. From among them I have chosen Daniel Morgan who was considered by General George Washington to be the right arm of the Continental Army, and I will relate what I know to be the greatest epochs in his life. He was born in the State of Pennsylvania, in the year 1736, of humble parents, where he lived until he attained the age of 17, and learned the little that could be learned at a country school at that time.

He then wandered south to Virginia, and became a driver of a wagon on a large plantation. He owned a team at the time when foolish General Braddock marched

to the fatal battle with the Indians at Fort Du Quesne, and he accompanied that expedition as a bearer of supplies.

One of the officers accused Morgan of insulting him, and for this alleged insult he was beaten in a cruel manner, with a hundred lashes, though he received it without murmur or flinching.

The officer soon learned the truth, and publicly apologized to young Morgan for the treatment he underwent, but ever afterward Morgan nourished a deep spirit of revenge against the British, and when the colonies declared war he was first to take up the sword in defense of his native land.

For his military skill in 1775 the first American Congress appointed him captain, and in less than a week ninety-six men, with him as their leader, marched away to Boston.

He joined Arnold at the Kennebec and led that never-to-be-forgotten expedition to the St. Lawrence, and at the siege of Quebec it was upon his riflemen that Arnold's army depended for victory when nearly all hopes had fled.

At this critical moment, when Arnold fell wounded on the field, and when the battle raged its fiercest, Morgan sprang forward with the remnants of his ninety-six men, took command of the nearly annihilated army and fought desperately until he was made prisoner. He was exchanged shortly afterward, and was commanding colonel at the battle of Cowpens, in which he was in a desperate hand-to-hand fight and inflicted a most terrible defeat upon the British under a most noted general named Tarleton and gained what is known as the most decisive victory among the hard-fought battles of the Revolution. For this act Congress awarded him the thanks of the nation and a gold medal. His health gradually failed him and he left the service and devoted himself to his farm until the year 1800, when he removed to Winchester, Va., and after a lingering illness due to general debility he died in the month of July in 1802, being sixty-six years of age.

A Naval Hero of 1779.

(By Herbert E. Sliter, Sliters, N. Y.)

I noticed your prize contest for the best articles on great men and I desire to become a contestant. Following is my article:

John Paul Jones was the most distinguished naval hero of our Revolutionary war. He was the creator of the American navy. He was as redoubtable upon the ocean as Washington was on land. He had the boldness to follow the enemy to the very seat of power, and the people of many British coast towns trembled at his name. John Paul—the name of Jones was assumed long

after—was born on the 6th of July, 1774, at Kirkbean, Scotland. He early embarked in the naval service of the United States, and was the first to unfurl the banner of the République on the Delaware. The capture of sixteen prizes in little more than six weeks proved his activity and prowess.

In 1778 he enlarged his sphere of operations and kept the coast of England and Scotland in constant alarm.

Boldly entering the harbor of Whitehaven, he took two forts and fired the shipping they protected. Hurrying from point to point wherever a prize was to be taken or a daring deed to be done, he seemed everywhere present and always invincible.

In September, 1779, with the *Bon Homme Richard* of forty guns, accompanied by the *Alliance* and several smaller vessels, Jones encountered off the coast of England a British fleet returning from the Baltic under convoy of two frigates. The commander of the *Serapis*, a forty-four gun frigate, bore down upon the Americans and one of the most terrible actions recorded in naval history followed. So that the enemy might have no advantage in the superior size of their guns Jones brought his vessel so close to the *Serapis* that their sides touched.

Broadside after broadside was poured in by both parties. The *Serapis* was soon in flames, and the *Bon Homme Richard*, little more than a shapeless hull, had most of her guns silenced. The British attempted to board the latter, but were repulsed.

The *Alliance* now came up and after first giving her consort a broadside by mistake turned her guns on the enemy.

The *Serapis* struck. With some difficulty Jones brought his scattered prizes to the coast of Holland, after which he returned to America in the *Ariel* and arrived in Philadelphia, February 18, 1781. On the 14th of April Congress expressed its thanks to Captain Jones for the service he had done.

At the end of the war he received an invitation to enter the naval service of Russia, and on his arrival in St. Petersburg, the Czar conferred on him the rank of rear admiral.

He assumed command of the naval force to operate against the Turks. He died in Paris July 17, 1792, at the age of forty-five years.

The character of Jones may be summed up in a few words. He was a man of dauntless courage, of great coolness and ability in the midst of danger. His best love was given to America and to the cause of liberty. Though he afterward served Russia, it was by permission of Congress, and in pursuance of a restless spirit of adventure.

His was the spirit from which heroes are made, and he lacked only means and opportunities to achieve as great a fame as any warrior in our Revolutionary war.

Hunting and Trapping Department.

This department is brimful of information and ideas of interest to the young trapper and hunter. Write us if you have any questions to ask concerning these subjects, and they will be answered in a special column. Address all communications to the "Hunting and Trapping Department."

Squirrels, and How to Trap Them.

There are many species of squirrels found in the United States, but their fur is of little value, and of trifling importance in the fur trade; the squirrel fur of our markets being that of a small gray European variety. Squirrels, as a class, possess much the same peculiarities and habits. Their claws are particularly adapted for life among the trees; their tails are long and bushy, covering over the backs of the animals when in a sitting posture.

They are all lithe and quick of movement, and their senses of sight and hearing are especially keen. They are constantly on the alert, and are full of artifice when pursued. Their food consists chiefly of nuts, fruits and grain, but when pushed by hunger, there is no telling what they will not eat.

They generally provide for the winter months by laying up a store of the foregoing provisions, either in holes in trees or interstices in the bark, or in cavities under ground. The shag bark hickory offers an especial inducement to these provident creatures in the numerous crevices and cracks throughout the bark.

It is not an uncommon thing to find whole handfuls of nuts carefully packed away in one of these cracks, and a sharp stroke with an ax in the trunk of one of these trees will often dislodge numbers of the nuts. The writer has many a time gone "nutting" in this way in the middle of winter with good success.

The nests of squirrels are generally built in trees, either in a crotch between the branches or in some deserted woodpecker's hole. Some species live in burrows in the ground, and those individuals who are lucky enough to be in the neighborhood of a barn often make their abode therein, taking their regular three meals a day from the granary. In many localities these animals thus become a perfect pest to the farmers, and their destruction becomes a matter of urgent necessity.

Squirrels, although resembling each other much as regards their general habits, differ considerably in the size and color of the different species.

The principal varieties found on our continent are:

The large gray squirrel, which is common in the Eastern and Middle States, and which is about two feet in length, including the tail. The common red squirrel, or chicaree, smaller than the foregoing, and found more or less all through the United States. The black squirrel, which is about the size of the gray, and found in the northeastern part of the United States, near the great lakes. In the Southern States there is a variety known as the fox squirrel, about the size of the red squirrel, and quite variable in color. The Middle States furnishes a species called the cat squirrel, rather smaller than the preceding. Its tail is very broad, and its color varies from very light to very dark gray.

The ground squirrel, or chipmuck, with its prettily striped sides, is common to most of our readers, its general color being red and the stripes being black and white.

Another burrowing species, known as the Oregon or downy squirrel, is found in the territory from which it takes its name, and also northward in British America. In size it resembles the chipmuck, and its color is light red above, pure white beneath, and silver gray at the sides.

The beautiful silky variety known as the flying squirrel, with its gray chinchilla-like fur and loose skin, is found throughout the United States east of the Mississippi.

Louisiana and Texas furnish the golden-bellied squirrel, which is about twenty inches in length, with tail golden yellow beneath, and golden gray above. The sooty squirrel is also found in this locality, being about the same size as the last mentioned, and black above and brownish red beneath.

There are other varieties in California known as the woolly, soft-haired, and weasel squirrels, which are about the size of the large gray variety of the Eastern and Middle States.

Squirrels as a tribe are much sought for as pets, and most of the species are easily tamed.

Box traps of various kinds are used in taking them alive.

Following are directions for making a good squirrel trap:

In appearance it looks like an oblong box.

The distinguishing feature is one end, which is made of a piece of board which rises several inches above the end of the box and ends in the shape of a wedge.

These traps may be made of any size. They should be made of hard seasoned wood—oak or chestnut is the best—and of slabs about an inch in thickness. The pieces may be of the following dimensions: Let the bottom board be 15x4 in.; side board 15x5 in.; lid board, 14x4 in., and the end piece of lid 3 in. square.

The tall end piece should be about 12 inches high by 5 broad: Let this be sharpened on the upper end, and furnished with a slight groove on the summit, for the reception of the cord. Now to put the pieces together.

Nail the two sides to the edge of the bottom board, and fit in between them the high end piece, securing that also with nails through the bottom and side boards. Next nail the lid board on to the small, square end piece, and fit the lid thus made neatly into its place.

To make the hinge for the lid two small holes should be bored through the sides of the trap, about four inches from the tall end, and half an inch from the upper edge of each board. Let small nails be now driven through these holes into the edge of the lid, and it will be found to work freely upon them.

The principal part of the trap is now made, but what remains to be done is of great importance. The "spindle" is a necessary feature in nearly all traps, and the box trap is useless without it. In this case it should consist merely of a round stick of about the thickness of a lead pencil, and we will say, 7 or 8 in. in length. One end should be pointed and the other should have a small notch cut in it. The spindle being ready, we must have some place to put it. Another hole should be bored through the middle of the high end piece, and about 4 inches from the bottom. This hole should be large enough to allow the spindle to pass easily through it. If our directions have been carefully followed, the result will now show a complete, close fitting trap.

In setting the trap the string must be fastened to the end of the lid.

The lid is raised and the string is passed up over the high back piece and then down to a point near the "spindle." There a stick is inserted, one end fitting in the notch of the spindle and the other end fitting under a nail or plug driven into the wood above the hole. Tie the string to the middle of this stick.

When the bait is touched from the inside, the stick or "brace" easily flies out and the lid falls, securing its victim. It is a wise plan to have a few holes through the trap in different places, to allow for ventilation, and it may be found necessary to line the cracks with tin, as sometimes the enclosed creature might otherwise gnaw through and make its escape. If there is danger of the lid not closing tightly when sprung a stone may be fastened upon it to insure that result.

For squirrels, this trap should be set in trees. The little animals may be attracted by various baits, such as an apple or a nut.

Shooting and Poisoning.

Until the introduction of the steel trap shooting was a common method of taking fur bearing animals, and even to the present day it is quite prevalent in some localities. Any one who has had any experience with the fur trade must have learned that furs which are "shot" are much affected in value. Some furriers will not purchase such skins at any price; and they never meet with any but a very low offer. "Trapped furs" and "shot furs" are terms of considerable significance in the fur trade, and any one who wishes to realize from a profitable sale of his furs should use his gun as little as possible. A shot grazing through the fur of an animal cuts the hairs as if with a knife, and a single such furrow is often enough to spoil a skin. It is these oblique grazing shots which particularly damage the fur, and an animal killed with a shotgun is seldom worth skinning for the value of its pelt. If firearms are used, the rifle is preferable. If the animal chances to be hit broadside or by a direct penetrating bullet, the two small holes thus made may not particularly effect the value of its skin, although even then the chances are rather slight.

Trapped furs are of the greatest value.

The use of poison is objectionable as a means of capture in animals especially desired for their fur. Strychnine is the substance generally employed, and unless its victim is skinned immediately after death the pelt becomes considerably injured by the absorption of the poison. It has the effect of loosening the fur and the hair sheds easily.

The poison is principally used in the capture of wolves and animals considered in the light of vermin. For a wolf or fox, the poison is mixed with lard or tallow and spread on pieces of meat, or a small amount of the powder is enclosed in an incision in the bait. The amount sufficient for a single dose may be easily held on the point of a knife blade, and death ensues in a very few moments after the bait is taken. For a bear the dose should be a half thimbleful, and it should be deposited in the center of a piece of honeycomb, the cells being emptied of their honey for that purpose.

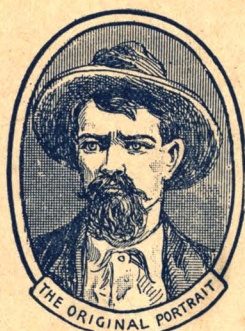
Other animals may be taken by proportionate quantities of the poison, but for general purposes we discourage its use.

EXCHANGE COLUMN.

(Notice.—This column is free to all our readers. We cannot be responsible for transactions made through notices in this column. All offers must be strictly exchange offers, and no "for sale" advertisements, or exchanges of firearms, explosives, or dangerous or worthless articles will be printed. Address all communications for this column to "Exchange Column.")

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